
天鏡のアルデラミン
ねじ巻き精霊戦記
Alderamin on the Sky II
II
宇野朴人
Uno Bokuto
Illustration さんば挿
電撃文庫

Nejimaki Seirei Senki – Tenkyou no Alderamin

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by Uno Bokuto

Novel Updates

Volume 2 Color Pages


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Alderamin on the Sky II
The knights
トルウェイ・レミオン
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の准尉。帝国騎士。パートナーは風精霊サフィ。爽やかでシャイな二枚目で、イグセム家と並び立つ旧軍閥の名家レミオン家の三男坊。銃撃の才は光るものをもっている。
シャミーユ・キトラ・カトヴァンマニニク
カトヴァーナ帝国の第三皇女。皇室の人間らしい威厳を漂わせるが、一方で媚びない愛らしさも併せもつ少女。イクタに絶大な信頼を寄せ、帝国の運命を左右する「ある重大な任務」を課すのだが……。
ヤトリシノ・イグセム
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の准尉で、帝国騎士でもある。パートナーは火精霊シア。イクタの才能を誰よりも理解している少女。旧軍閥の名家イグセム家出身で、近接戦闘では鬼神のごとき能力を見せる。
マシュー・テトジリチ
イクタやヤトリと同輩の准尉。帝国騎士。パートナーは風精霊ツウ。ヤトリやトルウェイの才能に嫉妬し、劣等感も抱くが、着実に軍人として成長している少年。よくイクタにからかわれている。
イクタ・ソローク
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の准尉。栄誉ある「帝国騎士」の称号ももつ少年。パートナーは光精霊クス。昼寝と徒食と女漁りが趣味で、周囲からは「怠け者」と陰口を叩かれるが、その頭脳の冴えは帝国一!?
ハローマ・ベッケル
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の准尉。帝国騎士。パートナーは水精霊ミル。心優しい衛生兵として、殺伐とした戦場の中で活躍する。押しに弱い性格が災いして、しばしばイクタに口説かれ、困っている。


カンナ·テマリ
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の一等兵。二十歳。
パートナーは風精霊タブ。部下の面倒見
もいい、優秀な軍人。知的好奇心が旺盛
で、いつも新しい世界に憧れている。北域
鎮台第一連隊所属で、中央軍事基地から
赴任してきたイクタと出会うことになる。


ナナク・ダル
大アラファトラ山脈に住まう山岳民族「シナーク族」の少女。十九歳。パートナーは風精霊ヒシャ。喜怒哀楽の感情表現が激しいタイプで、こうと決めたら頑固に譲らず、持ち前の行動力を発揮する。カトヴァーナ帝国の北域に暮らすとはいえ、シナーク族は帝国を憎んでいた。その黒い感情が爆発するとき、ナナクは――。


デインクーン・
ハルグンスカ
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の准尉。パートナーは水精霊ニキ。北域鎮台第一連隊所属、第三十三胸甲騎兵小隊隊長。190センチの身長を誇る大男で、筋骨隆々の軍人らしい軍人。単純な脳筋ではあるが、思ったことを全て口に出す、裏表のない好漢。
センパ・サザルーフ
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の中尉。パートナーは光精霊キィ。北域鎮台第一連隊所属、第九光照兵中隊隊長。器用で要領のいいタイプの軍人だが、根本的に人が好いため、部下からも慕われている。赴任してきたイクタたちには、なにくれとなく世話を焼いてくれる。


ヒルミシュ・
ニカフーマ大尉
アムーセ・スルカッタ中尉
マヌバンス・
ナジル中尉
ユスクシラム・トァック
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の少佐。タムツークツク中将の副官。出世街道からは外れてしまっているが、バランスのとれた判断力をもつ有能な軍人。北域鎮台の実質的な屋台骨で、部下からの信頼も厚い。
タムツークツク・サフィーダ
カトヴァーナ帝国軍の中将。北域鎮台司令長官。傲慢かつ尊大な軍人。たいていのことは副官のユスクシラム少佐に任せているが、シナーク族への弾圧だけは自らが率先して動いている。


カトヴァーナ帝国
周辺地図
大アラファトラ山脈
シナーク族居住圏
北域
北域鎮台第一基地
カトヴァーナ帝国
キオカ共和国
帝都バンハタール
ターバイ山脈
帝国軍中央基地
南ウルト森林地帯
ヒルガノ列島
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Designed by AFTERGLOW
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Prologue

That place was a little closer to the heavens than the earth, possibly closer to death.

The vegetation dotting the rock was sparse, the presence of animals was rare, and the blessing of life was hard to come by anywhere. Irrelevant to the abundance of water. This place was more prone to a lack of air.

“…Oof…! Hah…And, one…!”

The hoe which the man swung down stuck into the ground and churned the gravelly soil.

No matter how unkind the world is to them. If they have no other place to go, people would live there. They split open the wasteland, plow it, plant it, and live eating their meager harvest.

Together, of course, with the Hahashik[1]. Together with the one precious proof of the world’s love.

“Alright, good work! Now, take the Sorghum grains with you. We’re aiming for three sacks!”

“Hey, understood! Take it ‘n go!”

Stopping the hand holding his hoe, the man turned his head to the direction of the voice. His personal granary was over there. Several of his compatriots had opened the lock and entered, and were carrying out from inside the corn which he had harvested and ground into flour last year.

Three sacks. That, is not a trifling amount. Not at all. It was enough for a family of four to live on for four months.

“That would leave us with one meal a day until the next harvest. Is this really okay, Meraiz?”

His partner, a water spirit, whose body was fixed to the man’s back with a belt styled like the letter “X” and who had been scattering fertilizer on top of the dirt at the same time as the man had been plowing, asked this of his master.

“It’s fine, Eku. The children of the future will eat it. I’ll think of it like that, and I won’t feel hungry.”

“Before the future, the children of the present will starve. You have three of them in your household, Meraiz.”

“Then, I’ll make do with one meal every two days. That way, the children can eat two meals a day.”

With unshakable determination in his heart, the man answered. Confirming that this was an unmovable conclusion for his master, the spirit accepted it and nodded again, and the two of them silently continued their work.

"Hey, Meraiz, Dar Nanak's comin' today! Come by 'n say hello, don't hafta be much!"

At that voice, the hand plowing the dirt stopped. In the next moment, sticking his hoe by his feet, the man dashed across the fields. Starting to run after his compatriots who'd gone ahead of him, he overtook them and went even further.

At last, he could see it. His figure was there on the highest ground in the surrounding area, at a place which allowed him to command a view of the earth.

At first sight, he took a breath. She was accompanied at her rear by many warriors who were armed with air shooters and bow guns. The man was staring straight ahead of him far into the distance at the one to whom he would entrust his children's futures.

"Long time no see, little girl."

Facing the back of a small body, the man thus called out. Waiting one beat, the girl's slightly hard voice came back.

"That form of address, cease with it already, Meraiz. …Yesterday night, the succession to the title of Dar was formally completed, wasn't it? No more jokes from now on- I'll have you treat me as the head of the family."

It was a tone that deliberately eliminated familiarity. Sensing her, the man revised his attitude.

"…That was rude of me. Dar Nanak."

"That is better."

Nodding repeatedly, the girl didn't face him again. From her firm demeanor, the man felt a sense of trust together with a touch of loneliness.

"Dar— so, how are the preparations for battle?"

"The soldiers are adequately disciplined. The preparation of the chosen site in the mountains is also 80% completed."

"I see…"

"You peasants have shouldered the burden for it. To invite their carelessness, I didn't allow you to work on the plains for a while, and I didn't allow you even to go retrieve the abducted Hahashik. …Those who have lost their partners, those who have let their children starve, they are allowed to hate me."

At the girl's words, which emerged with a bitter smile, the man was silent and shook his head side to side. That was chief among all of her resolutions.

"—When's it starting, the battle?"

“Very soon. Likely, before the next Spirit Festival.”

Sooner than expected, the day of destiny was drawing near. The man body’s shook suddenly and inquired.

“…Can we win, Dar Nanak? Against them…those, frightening changelings of the plains.”

Receiving his question, the girl reached out her hand to the endless scene sprawled out below her as if she were yearning for something-

“…Say, Meraiz. Our current world[2], it’s only half.”

Like that, she tightly clenched her fist. With the determination to seize the future.

“That’s why I’m going, to take it back. The other half of the world[3] that was taken from us.”

The dearest wishes of the clan, the vow of certain victory, her actions spoke more eloquently of those than anything.

“—You understand, right? That is why we must be victorious!”

Over the ridges, through the trees, into the valleys- her voice echoed across to every corner of the mountains.

Chapter 1: An Open Box and its Unfortunate Contents

30 kilometers south from Imperial Capital Banhataal, the Imperial Army Center Base.

Under the violent sunlight. Even today, the stationed soldiers were dripping with sweat from their training.

“Hurry with the hospitalization! When they fall back to the logistical support line, begin the stop-gap measures!”

The one giving commands to her subordinates at the top of her lungs, marked by her tall build and flowing light-blue hair, was Warrant Officer Haroma Bekkel.

She seemed slightly unreliable due to both her youth and lack of experience, but contrary to that impression, she was a prominent person of promise who held the title of “Imperial Knight.”

“You there, make your stitches smoother! You’re using too much ice! Half of one piece is enough for a bruise of that level! …Ah, over there, the position of your hands is too high for a cardiac massage! Press the heart at the protrusion of the sternum! Do you understand?! Try to push up from a lower point, like this!”

During relief practice which treated mannequins as injured soldiers, Haro was briskly going around and pointing out her subordinates’ mistakes.

As a water spirit holder and a graduate of a Nursing Academy, she commanded a Medics Platoon. They were mixed-gender like the other Divisions, but the ratio of female soldiers was slightly larger. The Medics themselves were deployed like any other unit, but her platoon, whose chief responsibility was running around the front lines providing relief, was one kind of search-and-rescue unit.

Their work could be compared to that of angels in two meanings. One meaning in that they are the saviors of injured persons who are unable to move. The other in that they are the ones who come to retrieve those who die in battle in their last moments.

“That’s enough! Groups which haven’t finished their treatments yet, please report your points of reflection to me! Other than that, form a line and return to the barracks!”

About half of the soldiers gathered in the open space left, and Haro received reports from the other half. The whole time, she had noticed a figure she recognized lingering in her peripheral vision… when the last group gave their thoughts and the need for restraint was gone, she walked over to him.

“Good afternoon, Ikta-san. Are you okay sleeping here?”

Haro called out in a warm voice to the youth lying down on the grass and reading a letter. Hearing that, Ikta raised his upper body and stretched like a cat.

“Yo, good afternoon, Haro. Worry not. Wherever I sleep, the right half of my bed is always reserved for you.”

It was his standard banter. Thinking it shameful to be teased all the time, Haro struck back today.

“…R-really? Haven’t your appointments been completely booked until a short while ago?”

“It depends on you whether I progress one step forward in making that kind of dream-like schedule into a reality. …Which day do you wish to reserve?”

Ikta’s eyes glinted suspiciously. Sensing that it was dangerous to go too far, Haro panicked and changed the topic.

“N-nevermind that, Ikta-san, where is your unit?”



“Unit? Ahh, them- if Suuya’s there, I can go around without a problem. And besides, I understand that it’s required, but I’m worse with this practice by repetition thing than I am with eating live centipedes.”

Ikta stuck out his tongue playfully. Haro smiled wryly at his excuse, but she was also relieved at the same time. –The laziness of this person, who didn’t resemble a soldier in the least, in middle of an overly strict military structure which prized discipline felt like an oasis to Haro.

“What’s that you are reading?”

When Haro asked innocently, Ikta returned the page to his face, and scoffed as if he were bored.

“—‘Anarai’s Box’ is open.”

“…? What kind of box is it?”

When Haro tilted her head, Ikta began explaining it lazily.

“In short, it’s a safe. Except what’s inside isn’t money or jewels but a fortune of knowledge. …Umm, have I told you that I studied under Professor Anarai Khan?”

“He’s the person who was taken as a refugee by Kioka, isn’t he? Science, was it? You said you learned it from that person…”

“Right, I am one of the ‘Apprentices of Anarai.’ There are many other apprentices in the world, and there are several rules which we share among us. One of those is that we put the research results cultivated by Anarai Khan and his apprentices into, well, ‘Anarai’s Box’—basically we make it into restricted knowledge."

“So you’re secretive?”

“Not quite secretive- it’s more like we’re cautious. Making it restricted knowledge is a temporary measure, and afterwards, based on a discussion in light of various circumstances, we’ll even publish it. Well, it’s our style to not thoughtless discharge the research results. A single invention could turn the world upside down, you see.”

Ikta spoke without hesitation, and honestly, in Haro’s mind, an “invention which could turn the world upside down” couldn’t exist. This kind of contradiction sometimes made her aware of the difference in upbringing between her and the youth.

“Except, speaking strictly about this time, it wasn’t that we took the plunge and opened it to the public after carefully looking at the circumstances- it was more like we were cornered and prodded from behind and compelled to have a discussion. …That old man, since he sought refuge in Kioka, it seems he was asked for several technological provisions which would be useful to military affairs. There are several technologies which he’d reluctantly disclosed. And, he reported that line-up to apprentices like me who have remained in the Empire.”

When he explained that far, Ikta shrugged with weary face.

“…Then as a result of our discussion, we are going to disclose several new technologies in the Empire as well in a way that restores the balance with Kioka. And it seems that I, who has for some reason enlisted in the army of all things, must become the messenger concerning these new technologies relevant to military affairs because of my position.”

Ikta’s attitude said that this wasn’t a big deal, but Haro didn’t quite understand the scale of what he was talking about.

As if he sensed her confusion, but Ikta scoffed and stood up-

"I rambled on about nothing. Well, just that the battle ground is evolving. It's not worth rejoicing over or anything. Rather- I'll just say it- I'd rather this kind of thing just crash and burn!"

Holding aloft the disheveled, crumpled letter, he threw it into the sky as hard as he could.

"Cease fire!"

With that command as a signal, the gunshots which had been sounding nonstop suddenly quieted away. The soldiers who had been arranged in one horizontal line quickly reformed their files, and turned presenting arms in the direction of their commander.

"Hm, well done. You guys are looking good." The officer marked by his unruly brown hair and plump physical constitution, Warrant Officer Matthew Tetdrich, gave an honest evaluation. It wasn't flattery. In truth, the speed and accuracy of the soldiers' response to Torway's command was beyond recognition compared to when he was first entrusted with a platoon.

"Next, a bayonet charge after two volleys. Change into your ranks for the line of battle, all hands ready your bayonets!"

The clanking sound of blades being fixed onto gun barrels overlapped and echoed. Without a moment's delay the commander's order came. Following two discharges of a gun, the straw posts which they were treating as enemy soldiers were dispersed and scattered.

"It's coming along quite nicely, isn't it? Your subordinates' condition."

Matthew expected agreement when he said that, but his colleague who would always say, "I guess so," in a kind voice, for some reason, was making a stern face next to him and glaring at the backs of the soldiers.

"…It's no good, not like this. …With training of this kind, no matter how much time passes…"

On the other side of his bangs, Warrant Officer Torway Remeon's green eyes shook with impatience. There was no joy or sense of accomplishment. Even though concerning the soldiers' proficiency, it was he and not Matthew who was one lap ahead.

When he saw Torway act like that, Matthew began to feel embarrassed about himself. –What did he mean by well done? At this rate, he was face to face with the rival several steps ahead on himself, and he was lacking.

"…Ah, sorry, Maa-kun. Did you say something just now…?"

"…No, nothing."

Cursing his own carelessness, Matthew tried to return his consciousness to his own soldiers. But then, the sound of horse hooves forcefully kicking the ground reached his ears, and the two soldiers unconsciously gazed in the same direction.

“…Yatori-san.”

Torway took a breath at the figure riding a horse as the vanguard of the cavalry group, the beautiful, awe-inspiring female figure which he knew by sight. The beauty of her fiery hair trailing in the headwind agitated their yearning and, along with impatience, amplified the youths’ desire to reach her level.

“Has she already entered cavalry training, that girl…. She’s skilled in horsemanship, but still that’s too fast. It’s supposed to be Imperial Army convention that the cavalry comes after you first perfect your command of infantry.”

While saying that, Matthew knew that he was making excuses. …Fortunately or not, among his friends, there were three people who were at a caliber high enough not restrained by convention. The troubled young man next to him was also one of them, but— even he was not at the same level as the fiery haired girl.

Twilight, when the hungry soldiers, finished with their training and classroom learning, were heading for the dining hall to eat dinner. While being protected on all sides by four bodyguards, a blonde girl with a high-class air about her walked down a dead silent hallway of the mathematics building.

“I shall eat dinner with the members of the ‘Order of Knights.’ Is that alright?”

“You don’t need take the trouble to go to a crowded dining hall- we’ll prepare your meal to your room…”

“A private room itself is too much special treatment. You mean to make them carry food to my room as well?”

“I’m afraid that before you became a soldier, you were one member of the Imperial Family, Your Highness.”

“*That* is trivial in this place. Even if the Imperial Family has the divine power to repel bullets.”

“When you eventually receive the Emperor’s crown, the entire nation will prostrate themselves before you, Your Highness. Isn’t that more like a divine power?”

At this reserved conversation, the youngest warrant officer in army history at 12 years, the Third Princess of the Katjvarna Imperial Family, Chamille Kitra Katjvanmanninik, heaved a sigh.

Those protecting her were newly selected bodyguard soldiers in light of the kidnapping incident earlier. How these faithful and trustworthy people tried to establish Her Highness, Chamille “as royalty” everywhere was vexing for the person herself. If they made her act as royalty to the extreme, then her public reason for entering the army would— it would adversely affect the Imperial Family’s plans to improve its image, but they didn’t seem to have the flexibility to think that far.

“You’re misunderstanding- what makes people prostrate themselves is political power. Many people

are mistaken about the nature of it. That power being called the power to communicate with god, God himself certainly has reservations about that…, no?"

Noticing a figure in her periphery vision, Her Highness, Chamille, unthinkingly slowed her walking pace. She cleared her throat for the benefit of her bodyguards, who had decelerated with the same timing as to not break their four-sided formation, and spoke.

"…I will follow shortly. Go to the dining hall before me. You may dine as well."

"Huh? No, we cannot-"

"Did you not hear me? That just now was an order from me as the Princess."

Addressed with that one phrase, even those bodyguards had no choice but to comply. Watching them as they reluctantly departed until they were completely gone, Her Highness, Chamille, turned on her heel and entered the classroom which she had just passed by.

"What are you doing in a place like this, Solork?"

In an obscure corner of the classroom, the youth she knew on sight was expressionlessly running a pen on paper. He didn't send a single glance toward the princess, but even that was typical. After a slight pause, a displeased voice spilled out.

"I'm drawing a blueprint. You can tell that much by looking, can't you?"

"In this dim room? You ruin your eyes. You should have asked Kusu for a Lantern."

"Well I am straining myself. But if I turned on a light at this hour, I'd stand out, wouldn't I?"

Does he not want the contents seen by other people? Drawn by curiosity, the princess peeked at the blueprint, but she couldn't make sense of what was being sketched by just looking at it once. It seemed like some sort of long and narrow internal part?

"Hey, please don't lean your body over. You'll block my light- it's pitiful enough as it is."

Ikta was blunt. The princess huffily rested her body on the opposite desk and glared at him.

"You're misunderstanding. I came to rebuke you."

"Then I'll speak. –How long do you plan on contenting yourself with the rank of warrant officer?"

The youth didn't move a single eyebrow. She took his silence as a good opportunity to interrogate him.

"Over half a year has passed already since your conferring of decorations. My remaining time is steadily decreasing. Do you think you'll make it in time like this?"

“…Now see here, princess. High Grade Military Officer Cadets usually advance and become second lieutenants simultaneously with their respective classes four years after their enlistment. Climbing the ranks comes after that. It’s something even a child would understand.”

“Can you take those kinds of ordinary steps and still become a captain or field marshal within five or so years? Your destiny dictates that you must make strides impossible for ordinary humans, over and over again.”

“Captain or field marshal, huh…. You’re asking rather directly, but can you imagine me five years from now standing side by side with Yatori and Torway’s fathers? You can’t, right? If you can, then that’s proof that a too-powerful imagination, princess. Please leave the army at once and become a writer of fairy tales.”

“Bada Sankrei stood side by side with those two. I think that it’s completely natural for his son to succeed him.”

Ikta sighed deeply at her response,. The princess would forever believe that the late great commander’s talents were now completely in Ikta’s hands. Foolish and immature blind faith.

However, the one who had created that blind faith was none other than Ikta himself. Disgusted by fate’s sense of humor, the youth decided to search outside common sense for material for his argument.

“That’s the gist of it. Though even if I try to climb the ranks, if there are no opportunities to carry out great services, then it can’t be helped, can it?”

“Hm.”

“Soldiers accomplish meritorious deeds in battle before they advance. If you want war, the one in the Eastern Province just ended. We don’t know when the next conflict will occur, first of all, and it’s obviously better if it didn’t occur at all. War is sometimes the price for failed diplomacy, after all.”

The princess had fallen into silence, and Ikta knew that his argument had worked. …No, she wasn’t planning on asking me seriously in the first place, he realized. However, she was also impatient. Even if he delayed climbing the ranks, it’s impossible if the person himself doesn’t have the minimum accomplishments.

“Hah… Advancement or meritorious deeds or whatever. These things you’re thinking are quite cynical, each and every single one of them.”

The girl, who was 12 years old at best, was not worried. Children ought to have worries suitable for children— believing so, Ikta forcibly shifted the conversation in a vulgar direction.

“—By the way, princess, since we have established that I have a mother complex, I don’t really want to be thought of as a loli-con by others on top of that.”

“…Huh?”

“I’m talking about appearances, see? It’s fine to develop a connection with the members of the ‘Order of Knights,’ princess, but you’ll be coming to see me privately just like you are right now, no? Sometimes you’ll even shake off your bodyguard soldiers. How do you think that will be interpreted from an outsider’s perspective?”

Her Highness, the Princess, was flabbergasted at first, but as her understanding deepened, her face slowly turned red. Now this way of not realizing these kinds of things is what you call child-like- Ikta sadistically shrugged his shoulders.

“…W-we’re going to be thought of like that!?”

“I’m saying that there are suspecting people everywhere. No, well, rather there’s a way of using this as an excuse. If you think shamelessly, if we’re lovers, then it’s not a suspicious relationship if we meet often. On the other hand, that relationship itself could be viewed as a problem, couldn’t it?”

Ikta’s remark did nothing to smooth the situation over, and Her Highness, the Princess’s face became increasingly red. Perhaps she became embarrassed to look him in the face during that time, but she turned away in a panicked manner appropriate for her age.

“I-I will be careful from now on…! I’m leaving now!”

“Yep yep. The best of dreams tonight, princess.”

He watched her leave half running out of the corner of his eye then returned his consciousness to the blueprint, but the sun had sunk too far while they were talking. Already, he could only faintly see the letters and diagrams he had drawn. He strained his eyes for a while, then released his pen.

“…I guess I’ll stop here for today. I’m hungry, let’s go to the dining hall, Kusu.”

“Yes, Ikta. If you are going to dine, then please take a larger portion of leafy vegetables today.”

Stuffing the rolled-up blueprints in his breast pocket, he stood from his seat and left the classroom. While relying his partner’s Lantern, he walked down the dark hallway at his leisure.

That day’s ballistics lecture was not pleasant for Yatorishino Igsem.

“…I hear she killed 30 people in under 30 seconds…”

“And that half of the corpses had no heads, and there was not one which was left whole…”

“As expected of Igsem- I can’t believe she’s human.” “Idiot, if she hears you she’ll make your head go flying too!”

It was because these rumors had been being exchanged in her vicinity since the start of the lesson.

It can’t be helped that they’re gossiping with half-truths, but can’t they at least talk so I can’t hear

them?- Yatori thought this fiercely. The story that she had slayed the members of the bodyguards led by Captain Ison Bou one after the other at the time of the aforementioned attempted kidnapping incident involving Her Highness, the Princess, had spread within the army as an exaggerated anecdote.

Already two months had passed since the incident, and it was losing its novelty as gossip, but… when she sat down with a crowd with which she shared no familiarity in a classroom lecture like this, the excitement of those days was suddenly resurrected. In any country in any time or place, soldiers are partial to a vivid epic.

“..But wait. If she’s that strong, wouldn’t she have been better off not turning it into a massacre?”

“Well, if she’d let one guy live, she coulda probably figured out who the leader is.”

“That’s ridiculous. You can’t work somethin’ like that out by increasing the kill count.”

She also heard some words close to slander mixed in with their simple-minded praise. Even if she couldn’t be happy like this, Yatori didn’t have the will to object to her “massacre” being overkill.

--Increasing the kill count, huh.

Yatori had no taste for masochism, but she meekly accepted that criticism. During that time, she did nothing but completely cut down any enemies who entered her vision. My sword, in essence myself. There was no trying to deny this reality.

“When too many generations are piled on a soldier’s lineage, that might be what comes of it, no? In short, the Igsems- ahh, ow!?”

A small stone that came flying out of nowhere struck the back of the person’s head who was amusing himself with the most boisterous chattering. When he held his head and cowered, the same things came flying at his cohorts around him.

“Oww!” “Agh! What’s this, a rock!?” “Who the hell did it!?”

Screams and angry roars came one after another, and the instructor, hearing the ruckus, turned away from the chalkboard.

“SILEENCE! You there, what are you doing?! I’m talking to you, Ikta Solork!”

The time it took for the instructor to identify the source of the ruckus was close to zero, as if he had fixed his sights on the problem child who was always causing trouble. The youth who was called by his full name stood up holding a palm-sized catapult he had made by combining wood and string.

“Please excuse me. I thought that I would explain the current state of the army’s battery like this so it’d be easier to understand.”

Ikta declared it shamelessly. The instructor walked to him and wordlessly struck his cheek.

"Ahh…What, was that unnecessary?"

"I am lecturing right now! Be quiet and learn ballistics!"

"Huhh, I was trying to make a demonstration with deep relevance to the current state of the battery. So that was unnecessary of me? Really? *Are you sure*?"

As Ikta faced him tenaciously with a stranger and stranger tone, the instructor showed a scowl implicit of anger. But, perhaps because it reminded him of something from his experiences up to this point, Ikta drew one step closer with an equally severe expression.

"…Speak. If it's not worthwhile, I'll have everyone run 20 laps around the base."

Regarding the enforced totalitarian military, collective punishment was the most basic of basics. The other soldiers sent him looks that said, "this is not a joke," but Ikta nevertheless nodded with composure. As though if he had to run because of something like that, he wouldn't be afraid.

"—Since I have received your permission, I will not hesitate.

Well then, the air mortar cannon is one of the main weapons of the Imperial Army of the present. It's constructed to use the pressurized air of four~six wind spirits to fire iron balls- a weapon like a giant air shooter, so to speak- but its handling often seems to be a problem for soldiers fighting on-site.

Now the causes. First, it's heavy. Even the smallest size requires one horse or three soldiers to carry. Second, its power is weak relative to its weight. It seems that its bullets are often bounced off stone fortresses. And third, it has a short range. Its greatest range is about 500 meters, but its effective range is 200 meters at best. In addition, if the terrain is unfavorable, then hiding the body is also difficult, and the enemy will come attacking before you can fire a second bullet. Soldiers can't run away when their shouldering a heavy cannon, and there are frequently cases reported of difficult situations where soldiers abandon it after firing only one shot."

He spoke fluently as if he'd read a script repeatedly. Taking no notice of the pressure of the collective punishment, Ikta held up his miniature handmade catapult and casually continued his explanation.

"So, as to what the soldiers who'd lost the air mortar cannon did afterwards, they turned the materials on-site into supplies and made *this*. As you can see, it is a catapult. Even though it is a primitive weapon that has been in use since over 1,000 years ago, it is surprising still on active duty. We cannot make light of it. Its power and range falls short of those of the air mortar cannon, but its strength lies in its ability to fire various things besides iron balls. Throwing flaming straw and starting a fire, throwing the remains of a horse killed by disease and spreading a plague, and so on. With this strength, the practicality to create on site, it has even given rise to the revivalist opinion among soldiers that we should retire the air mortar cannon and make the catapult their official arms."

He made an exaggerated gesture of shrugging his shoulders. His audience had unconsciously leaned in to hear him speak. Even unconsciously, Ikta Solork was able to put on this *show that made people*

listen attentively.

“Well, even if that is an extreme argument, it is the reality that the air mortar cannon is lacking in efficiency. Then, how should we improve it? We could consider a plan to make it more light weight, but if we ignore the practical problem, then that is misguided, right? If we make it easier to carry as mentioned, then rather than a cannon it’s a large caliber air shooter. The concepts of their designs would be fundamentally confused. What’s desired in a cannon is first, all the great power it has to compensate for the demerit of its weight. That is, the overwhelming destructive power to smash the enemy’s fortress and to destroy their trenches. The second is its range, but that comes naturally once you have power.

And so, the soldiers with the strongest offensive power on-site are the cavalry. Let’s say that even two times as many air gunner soldiers were present, they can’t stop a coordinated attack by the cavalry troops. Even now, when the personal combat strategy as fellow knights has become a relic of the past, a branch of the army that we can say is strong against the cavalry as a matter of fact doesn’t exist.

However, it is possible to imagine one. The cavalry’s offensive power is something brought forth by their orderly ranks and files. In that case, we just need to cause an impact that demolishes that. … Have you caught on yet? --Right, we want the power of a cannon to be sufficient for this. A battery with greater power can be an advantageous existence against the cavalry. As a result of the, the hierarchy of army branches which places the cavalry on top will likely collapse and be reorganized power relations resembling rock-paper-scissors that read cavalry → infantry, infantry → battery, battery →cavalry. The infantry is strong against the battery because it is light of foot and moreover because its ranks and files during a charge have flexibility.”

When Ikta hinted at something and stopped his explanation, the instructor agitatedly asked a question about an aspect he suddenly recalled.

“…Ikta Solork. Basically, it’s that. The ‘bomb cannon’ which has begun to be used in the Republic Army, you’re say we should employ it in the Imperial Army as well?”

“It could have that interpretation. I’ll leave everything to the audience.”

The instructor bent his mouth into a “へ” shape. –Though the admiration of enemy technology was an implicit taboo, this blatantly guided the audience’s awareness, and “I’ll leave everything to the audience” was cleverly said.

But, the instructor couldn’t reject his point as “not worthwhile.” Doing that would be deceiving himself. Because as a soldier on active-duty, as a teacher of ballistics, if he said that he had never felt the efficiency of the air mortar cannon to be definitely lacking, that would be a lie.

“…That was very interesting. Alright, I’ll pardon everyone 20 laps around the base.”

Remembering what was gambled on Ikta’s speech, the soldiers openly showed relieved faces. But, the smug expression as though that was the natural outcome of the person himself crumbled away with

the next line.

“And now the punishment for interrupting my lecture. Go and run 40 laps around the base by yourself, Ikta Solork.”

“…Haah!?”

A strange sound escaped from his stiffened throat. Ikta timidly peeked at the instructor’s face, but when he confirmed that there was not one bit of humor in it, he quickly resigned himself and ran out of the classroom.

“…Ahhh. He really likes to stir up trouble for himself, that guy.”

A mutter mixed with inappropriate laughter. But, in the next moment, Yatori stood from her seat without hesitation.

“—Instructor. May I also run outside and come back?”

“What reason do you have, Warrant Officer Yatorishino Igsem?”

“Let’s see. Just now, I interrupted your lecture for something insignificant. As punishment for that.”

When Yatori declared it clearly, the instructor’s lips unnaturally tightened. Was it Yatori’s imagination, or did it appear more like a suppression of a wry smile than an expression of anger?

“Go. But, don’t let Ikta Solork skip even a single lap.”

“Yes sir!”

Giving an awe-inspiring salute, the fiery-haired girl raced from the classroom like a streak of wind.

“Ahh, the time for the official tour of the Northern Province is finally here…. Things are going to get boring from now on, seriously.”

Noon of the next day. Seeing the message posted on the bulletin board of the barracks, Matthew sighed.

“The post is at the Soumin River Garrison…in the sticks[1] at the base of the great mountain range. It’s a place with nothing else besides the base, farms, mountains, and one small town. It’s the northernmost edge of Katjvarna. And yet since the bumpkins of Shinaak Tribe are so aimless there’s no public order.”

“It also sounds like there several opposition parties after the military stores. However, conversely we’re also using that the environment as a training ground for acquire actual battle experience, so I can’t say if the Imperial Army is being stubborn, or something else.”

Torway smiled wryly. At the same time, hands were placed on their shoulders which they had aligned as they stood.

“—I can hear you. Who is the hell is the one making fun of the Northern Province?"

“Eh, Ik-kun?”

“What’s your problem? -you picked a weird thing to take issue with. Where we’re headed is the countryside, isn’t it?”

Ikta tsked his tongue at Matthew, who shook off the hand placed on his shoulder and objected.

“I don’t get it. I mean, I like the city too, but saying something like the countryside = unglamorous is rather prejudiced. In particular, Matthew, you just made fun the Shinaak Tribe by calling them bumpkins. I doubt that. That’s proof that you don’t understand their magnificence.”

“Huh. Ik-kun, are you knowledgeable about the Shinaak Tribe?”

“Somewhat. When I was personally studying under that old man Anarai, I had the experience of going on a field study of the Shinaak Tribe’s cultural sphere. My aim was to investigate the geologic structure and climate of the alpines, but for me it was more enjoyable to interact with the native people. It’s a good memory.”

“Hmph, aren’t they barbarian mountain dwellers? What was so enjoyable about that?”

“They had several charms, but—if I had to pick one, the women were energetic and beautiful.”

Ikta spoke with a serious face. Matthew wearily shook his head.

“Aren’t you partial to older women? Our standards are too different so it’s not a good reference.”

“I won’t deny that, but the beauty of Shinaak women isn’t limited just to their exteriors. They have an extremely matrilineal society there, and the women are the ones who take leadership on everything. That gives rise to a peculiar custom. As an example of their extremeness… I think it was a year ago…”

After Ikta intelligibly whispered into their ears, Torway slightly blushed, and Matthew, his face twitching, leapt back.

“Th-that’s shameless! A woman did that to a man…!?”

“The world’s a big place, Matthew. The criteria for a shameless act changes with the location, see?”

Matthew was flustered, Torway was red-faced and silent, Ikta was teasing them. In the direction of these three people, each in his own way causing a racket, by chance came walking Her Highness, the Princess, and the remaining members of the “Order of Knights.”

"You all seem in a good mood. What are you making a fuss about in a place like this?"

"It'd have been better if Your Highness hadn't asked. With these circumstances, in eight or nine cases out of 10, it's about something dirty."

Shooting them cold glares, she hit on a fine point. At that, the innocent Torway became abashed and hung his head in embarrassment, but Matthew denied it as though it were unthinkable.

"I-I wasn't talking about anything to be guilty about! Ikta just started…"

"Dirty things? Oh you mean one like that. Haro's sweat-soaked shirt clinging tightly to the skin, and those round masses of Haro's which I recognize with one glance, or some romance filled story like that?"

"Eh….Ahhh!?"

Haro noticed her own state and panicked, running for cover to fix her attire. Yatori, seeing her off, kicked the offender's shin as hard as she could as minimal vengeance.

"…Hss!"

He didn't scream. Only a dull sound echoed, Ikta crouched there with a cold sweat breaking from his forehead. Everything below his shin was gone— for a moment he truly thought that.

"Please reflect on your actions. Someone who takes that attitude in the presence of women is the worst kind of scumbag."

Saying that then sending a backward glance to Ikta, who was unable to object due to the intense pain, she directed her gaze to the bulletin board.

"…Ahh, assignment to an official tour of the Northern Province. It's that time of year again, isn't it?"

"Besides dealing with the opposition parties and observing the mountain people, I hear it's a generally leisurely post. Half a year there. Yatori, you don't think that this a tedious custom?"

"No, I wouldn't have it any other way. Though it's on a small scale, I want acquire even a small amount of actual battle experience now."

At the promising reply, the princess didn't hide the affection showing in her expression. …But on the other hand, the moment her gaze returned to Ikta, who had yet to recover from the pain in his leg, she huffed a sigh of disappointment

"…Though I would like to see this kind of ambition from a certain someone else, too."

1. ↑ the middle of nowhere, surrounded by farming land

第二章

Alderamin on the Sky II

北の大地の諸問題

Chapter 2: The Various Problems with the Land of the North

After moving toward the northern boundaries, the humidity that always lingered around disappeared, the huge plants covering the dry soil were also replaced by grasslands, further north they arrived at a gravel area with very few water sources spread in the wilderness, this was an area harsh even for the most prepared traveler.

The soldiers, during this long-drawn carriage travel, could only gaze at the ever-changing terrain. At the very least they reached the so called “Place with no reclamation value” and consequentially abandoned as borders.

From the last village, which was also the closest about 10 KM away from their current position, they are welcomed to the Empire’s most northern outpost.

After all personnel were accommodated into the base, the welcome speech to the neatly-lined soldiers begun.

“High Grade Military Officer Cadets as well as the training soldiers, I welcome your arrival this year as well. I feel extremely joyous for your presence at the Northern stronghold!”

The interlocutor was the supreme commander of the Northern stronghold, Lieutenant General Tamshiikushik Safida.

“Then, moving to a gloomier topic… surely everyone present knows of the collapse of the eastern region. As a fellow protector of one-fifth of the Empire’s land, I feel deep regrets. The moment the savages of Kioka ravaged our lands, if I had lead a group of soldiers to the Eastern stronghold, then it wouldn’t have ended with such results… Even now, my chest still fills up with remorse when I think about this.”

After hearing such words, not only Ikta but many felt disagreement… Even without knowing how

many people his ‘a group of soldiers’ referred to, but given the scenario that even Lieutenant General Rikan, who was present there and risking his own life couldn’t do a thing, in which way would Lieutenant General Safida have overturned the situation? Furthermore, in his speech, not once has he given commemoration to the fallen officers.

“In order to avoid such re-occurrence, we have to train exhaustively every day and wholeheartedly mold an indomitable strength, technique and mindset. Because the day for the battle of revenge will come, and whether we are able to counterattack Kioka, all will depend on our soldiers’ loyalty and patriotism.”

After that, the rubbish motivational opening, which was something that would enter from one ear end exit throughout the other, continued for 20 minutes. The speaker was completely unaware of the growing boredom and the increasing annoyance among the soldiers.

“…based on the aforementioned, I hope that you, whom will be shouldering the future of the army, your patriotism shall be strong and pure! — Although brief, that was my speech.”

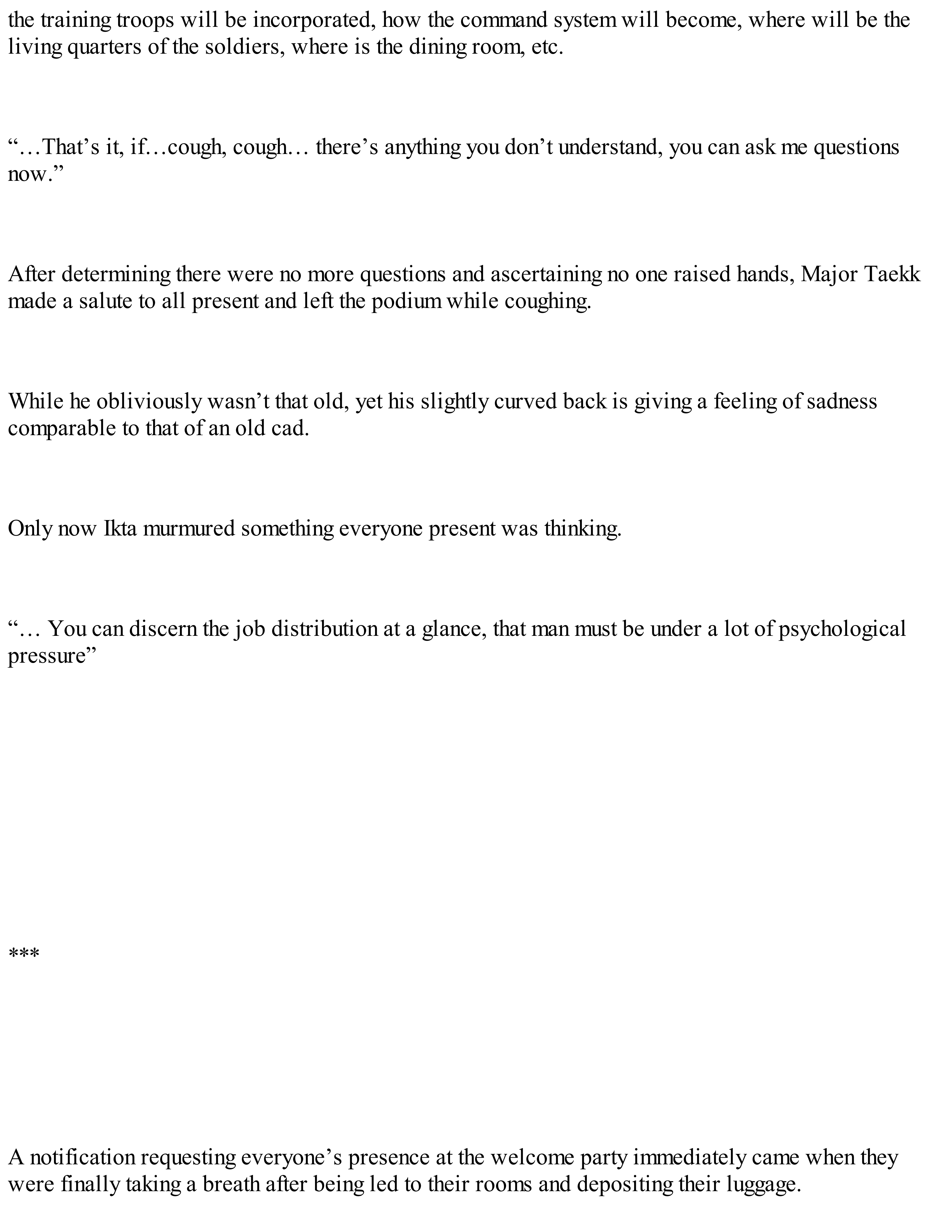
After the ending words, Ikta, standing at the front of the third illumination battalion, shrugged disapprovingly–Brief, huh? Where was it brief? Since it was just statement devoid of any content you should at least have the decency to end it early.

Lieutenant General Safida, while walking down and enjoying the feeling of finishing the speech, was replaced by a tall and slim looking man who is now standing on the podium.

Maybe he was feeling unwell? His complexion looked bad.

“…I’m the aide of the supreme commander… cough, cough… Major Yuskushiram Taekk. Cough… cough, cough… Sorry. Then I will herein state everyone’s treatment.”

Completely opposite to the empty speech given by the commander, Major Taekk exclusively instructed on practical and complete instruction. Such were information regarding which local troop



the training troops will be incorporated, how the command system will become, where will be the living quarters of the soldiers, where is the dining room, etc.

"…That's it, if…cough, cough… there's anything you don't understand, you can ask me questions now."

After determining there were no more questions and ascertaining no one raised hands, Major Taekk made a salute to all present and left the podium while coughing.

While he obliviously wasn't that old, yet his slightly curved back is giving a feeling of sadness comparable to that of an old cad.

Only now Ikta murmured something everyone present was thinking.

"… You can discern the job distribution at a glance, that man must be under a lot of psychological pressure"

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A notification requesting everyone's presence at the welcome party immediately came when they were finally taking a breath after being led to their rooms and depositing their luggage.

Since the time is now noon and this is a military facility on the border, even if it is called a welcome party, it is mainly just a plain gathering, even the location is just the big room used for conferences.

Based on the contents, Ikta and Yatori's Imperial Segal High Grade Academy's graduation meal was much more prosperous, but that situation was a given, and the only person who could complain about the absence of liquors would be Ikta.

"To the prosperity of the rule of his majesty and the lands protected by us soldiers– Cheers!"

Following the lead of Lieutenant General Safida, the military officers raised their cups filled with grape juice.

Next came the time of socializing, which to the High Grade Military Officer Cadets was a moment where they must accept the greetings of all senior officers.

Of course the interest of these people wouldn't have left alone the members of the legendary 'Order of Knights'.

"Are you the five who were bestowed knighthood together, the much anticipated newbies?"

"Heard you guys passed the Kioka border with her Highness the Princess? That luck is worth a toast, let's drink!"

"Did you meet Kioka soldiers? I heard they run like beasts and eat raw meat, is it true?"

Facing the five who obtained knighthood in such special case, the attitude of senior officers was displayed in a wide range. There were those who closed in by pure curiosity; also people leaking

jealousy every time they spoke; and of course people who tried to get close to them thinking ahead of the time.

There were especially many people asking a description of their fight with Kioka soldiers. The reason was because most of the soldiers living in the far north had no experience in engaging battle with Kioka.

Yatori and Torway's displayed the ability to cope with the situation, however Matthew and Haru's puzzled look were also at the center of the spotlight. Incidentally, Her Highness Chamille, with a not so amused look while sitting at the seat of honor, was having a conversation with Lieutenant General Safida who was sitting next to her.

Since she didn't want to intrude in the military formalities, she especially made use of her royal position to get out of the scene.

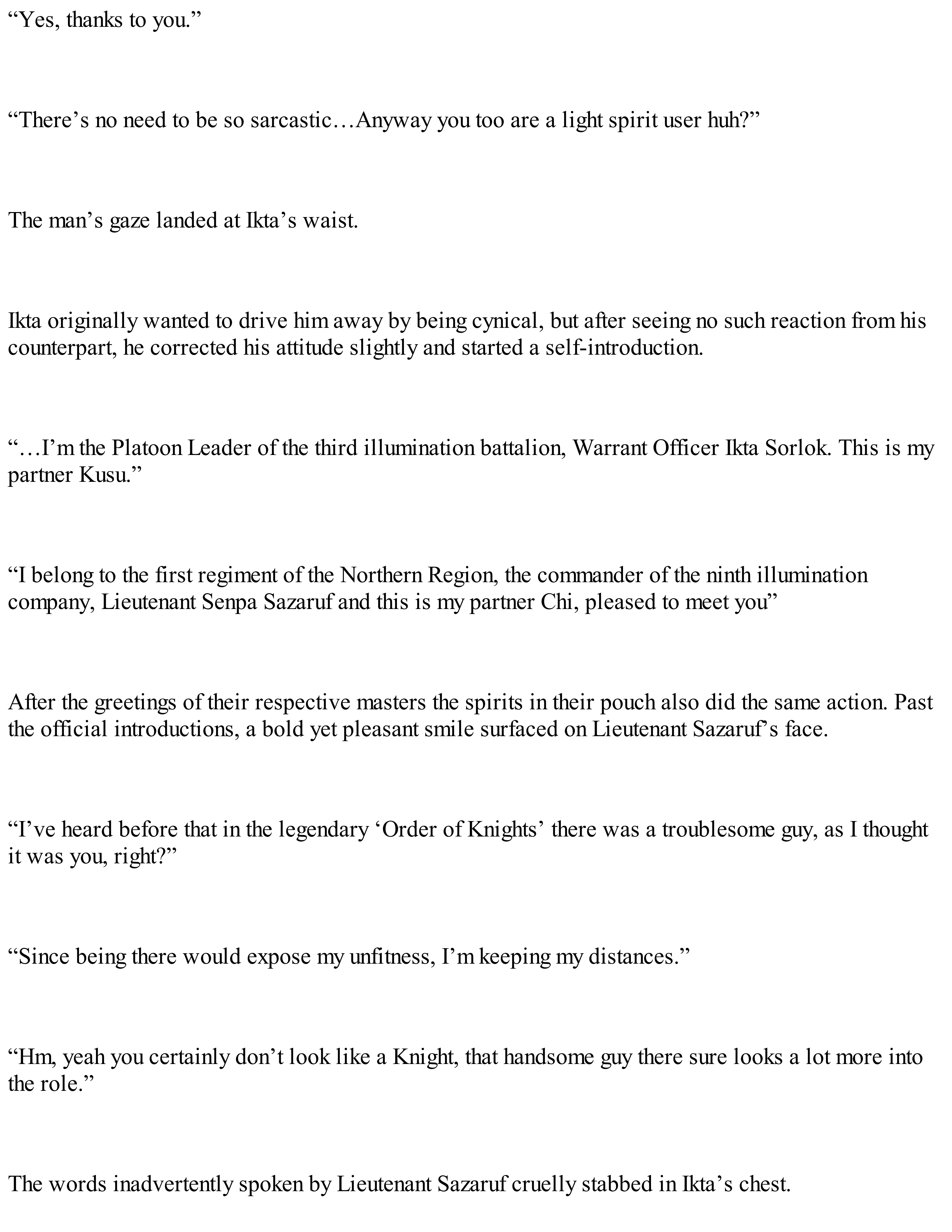
Well, talking about the only one who was left, he was already hiding around the corners of the room trying to avoid being at the center of discussion.

He had very little interest in military socializing to begin with, furthermore the only few female officials were already swarming around Torway, which made this case's boringness rare even for Ikta's standards.

However, when he was just about to sweep through all the food by munching silently, an officer left the group and walked towards Ikta. It was a young man with an uncleanly shaven beard and mustache. In his pouch one could see the same kind of light spirit as Ikta's Kusu.

"–Hey, are you having fun?"

The man affectionately spoke to Ikta and readily pulled a chair to sit next to him.



“Yes, thanks to you.”

“There’s no need to be so sarcastic…Anyway you too are a light spirit user huh?”

The man’s gaze landed at Ikta’s waist.

Ikta originally wanted to drive him away by being cynical, but after seeing no such reaction from his counterpart, he corrected his attitude slightly and started a self-introduction.

“…I’m the Platoon Leader of the third illumination battalion, Warrant Officer Ikta Sorlok. This is my partner Kusu.”

“I belong to the first regiment of the Northern Region, the commander of the ninth illumination company, Lieutenant Senpa Sazaruf and this is my partner Chi, pleased to meet you”

After the greetings of their respective masters the spirits in their pouch also did the same action. Past the official introductions, a bold yet pleasant smile surfaced on Lieutenant Sazaruf’s face.

“I’ve heard before that in the legendary ‘Order of Knights’ there was a troublesome guy, as I thought it was you, right?”

“Since being there would expose my unfitness, I’m keeping my distances.”

“Hm, yeah you certainly don’t look like a Knight, that handsome guy there sure looks a lot more into the role.”

The words inadvertently spoken by Lieutenant Sazaruf cruelly stabbed in Ikta’s chest.

“Haha–hahaha, hey you really are straightforward. Hahahaha…. Haha.”

Ikta, who originally attempted to overcome the situation with an impactful laughter failed, is now frozen in place with a half smiling face…

“…UuuUuuuUuArghHhhhHh…!!”

In the end, he held his head with both hands, lowered his stance and let out a beast-like sound.

“Whoa! Wait… you’re crying just for that…? Are these the legendary Manly Tears?”

“Damnit…! Those Ikemen who can attract women even without saying a word…such odious creatures!”

“Hey Hey Hey, you really just spoke whatever passed through your head! Your collapse as a human being is way too sudden!”

One could feel the commotion even from afar, and while Lieutenant Sazaruf was being overwhelmed by the situation, Her Highness Chamille, already feeling exhausted by the conversation with Lieutenant General, walked towards them with a disapproving expression.

“…I only took my eyes away from you for a moment… Sorlok, the banquet has just started, what are you feeling dissatisfied for?”

Instead of Ikta who was being interpolated by the Princess, it was Lieutenant Sazaruf who overreacted.

Seeing how he was standing straight while doing a formal salute, the Princess shook her head with a difficult expression.

“You can relax… No, please relax Lieutenant. As stated by the military ranks, you are actually my superior.”

“Ah, no… that would be outrageous…!”

“It seems Sorlok immediately brought you troubles. Not only he has a bad personality, his character is also an issue, but if you look deep enough there are still good parts. So, thank you for your care in the future… uhm…”

“This one belong to the first regiment of the Northern Region, Commander of the ninth illumination company, Lieutenant Senpa Sazaruf!”

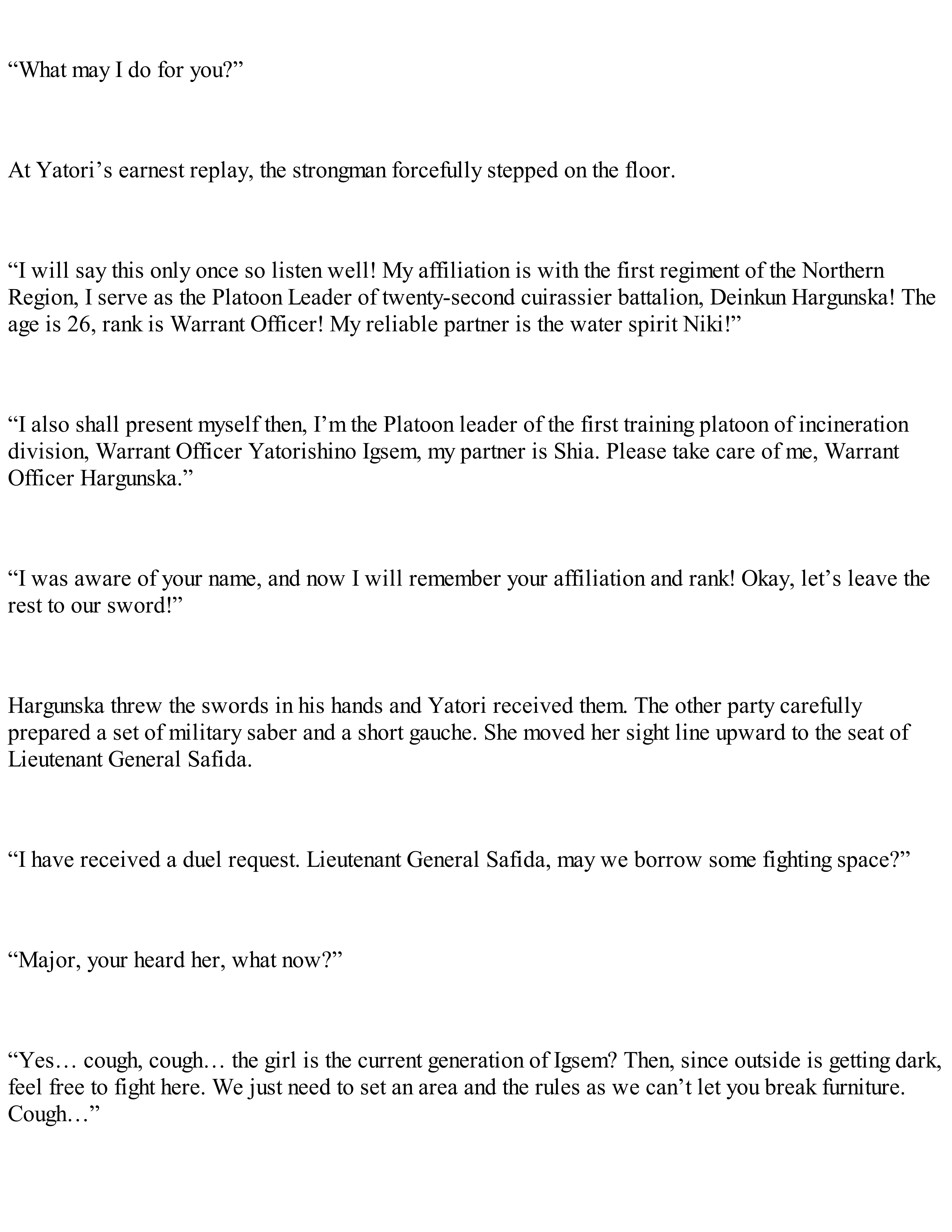
Their statements made it very awkward and he was not certain of which side was better. The so-called Royals are truly an existence that creates confusion in a vertical structure– Ikta thought so, but at that right moment a loud voice reverberated.

“Hahaha! My long awaited day has finally come! Daughter of Igsem!”

With a voice loud enough to make everybody turn their head, the owner of it proudly stood at the center of the room; Yatori who was laughing with senior officers faced him with a positive attitude.

The man was full of muscles, whether you looked at it vertically or horizontally, and had a lion like mane of hard red hair.

In addition to the two wooden swords in his hands, there was another strapped at his waist totaling three.



“What may I do for you?”

At Yatori’s earnest replay, the strongman forcefully stepped on the floor.

“I will say this only once so listen well! My affiliation is with the first regiment of the Northern Region, I serve as the Platoon Leader of twenty-second cuirassier battalion, Deinkun Hargunska! The age is 26, rank is Warrant Officer! My reliable partner is the water spirit Niki!”

“I also shall present myself then, I’m the Platoon leader of the first training platoon of incineration division, Warrant Officer Yatorishino Igsem, my partner is Shia. Please take care of me, Warrant Officer Hargunska.”

“I was aware of your name, and now I will remember your affiliation and rank! Okay, let’s leave the rest to our sword!”

Hargunska threw the swords in his hands and Yatori received them. The other party carefully prepared a set of military saber and a short gauche. She moved her sight line upward to the seat of Lieutenant General Safida.

“I have received a duel request. Lieutenant General Safida, may we borrow some fighting space?”

“Major, your heard her, what now?”

“Yes… cough, cough… the girl is the current generation of Igsem? Then, since outside is getting dark, feel free to fight here. We just need to set an area and the rules as we can’t let you break furniture. Cough…”

The Major feebly finished speaking, the Lieutenant General then fumblingly nodded, announcing to both:

“Good, you two may proceed, everyone else help moving the tableware… also it’s worth mentioning that in the whole Northern Garrison there’s no one who can match Hargunska’s sword skills. Against such fierce opponent, you can fully display the renowned reputation of the best two handed techniques of the Igsem family.”

Hearing that, Yatori instead left the short wooden gauche threw by her opponent in Haro’s custody.

Seeing this made Warrant Officer Hargunska very angry.

“Oi! What is the meaning of this?”

“Please don’t worry, I think facing an opponent wielding only one sword with two is unfair.”

Hearing those underestimating like lines made a vein pop on Hargunska’s solar plexus. He drew the large sword at his waist and held it in a frontal stance. His audacity made him look like a solid tower.

“You mean you are not taking me seriously! I sure am being underestimated!”

“Igsem’s two sword style was developed for the sake of facing many foes at once, if the opponent is a lone person, one sword is enough.”

Yatori’s casual replay made the calm officers get excited too. Without anyone saying so, the spectator moved to form a circle around the two resulting in the formation of a dueling space. The sudden tension made the majority of the people happy, but there were also a few among them with a cheeky unpleased look.

“…Such a vulgar practice, Yatori’s skills are not a showpiece for people to enjoy.”

Her Highness Chamille spoke with an unhappy face.

Hearing the Royalty’s thoughts, Lieutenant Sazaruf immediately intended to intrude the duel and stop it, but before he could, someone bluntly interrupted him:

“Your idea is wrong, Igsem’s sword skill is indeed a showpiece, princess.”

“… What did you say?” The princess stared Ikta with sharp eyes.

The young man disregarded the look Lieutenant Sazaruf sent as if saying “Have you gone mad? Who do you think you are replying to?” and continued:

“Seeing how smoothly the whole process went, I would say that nine out of ten this is a scheduled arrangement. Yatori should also have noticed it, this is common practice, it happens wherever a member of the Igsem family goes.”

“You mean even the supreme commander Safida want to watch such commotion? I really can’t understand people. Such abrupt and selfish actions clearly are ruining the order which is the basics of the military.”

Ikta gave a fleeting glance at the disagreeing princess and then moved his hand to his chin.

“… Why do you think Yatori is allowed to wield two swords?”

“If you are asking why… isn’t it because she is really strong?”

“It is not so. As princess has said it before, it is essential to maintain order in the military. Following this principle, not only soldiers but also officer should be given a standardized set of equipment, this is not something that can be changed on a personal basis. So the two wielding Yatori would be an impossible figure if you were following the normal rules.”

Seeing Ikta gushing out that speech made Lieutenant Sazaruf widen his eyes in surprise.

Since it seemed the tables have been moved, the dueling field prepared and the crowd parted to have a better look, the youth said to the princess as a prelude: “This will be a little long”

“Hundreds of years ago, when Katjvarna Empire was still in chaos, there were warlords everywhere, each advocating independence and regarding the land entrusted to them by the Emperor as their own. At that time without a strong central power, there were no military administration and the army had its own administrative unit. To be clearer it meant that in the Empire there where multiple Kings totaling dozens. In this scenario even the Emperor is but ‘one of the kings’.”

“That was common knowledge. After that, feeling a sense of looming crisis in the politically and militarily lacking Empire, from the powerful warlords, three forces stood out and crowned the Emperor as the absolute monarch. They were the Igsem, Remeon and Yurgus… the nowadays called ‘Loyal Triad’ families.”

“Yes, their objective was a central administration for political and military affairs, and putting those powers in the hands of the ‘Emperor’. This practice would reduce the risk of internal strife and create a system which could wholeheartedly fight foreign enemies.

Of course this was not an easy task since conflict could not be avoided with the selfishly proclaimed local warlords. But even so, in order to promote reforms, the loyal triad had to substantially reduce the amount of warlord clans. In other words, they used the tool called war to destroy them, but the process was not an eradication done indiscriminately and without distinction, they thought it through and made survival impossible only to hostile families. Among those who lived, there are families existing still today, the Tetdrich is one of such… them and the loyal triad are now called the old

warlord families."

"Exactly as you said…but what connection does this history have with 'showpiece of Yatori's swords'?"

"So, ah, the central government and the modern focus on order in the Katjvarna's army… the one who established those foundations were no other but Yatori's ancestor. As a descendant of the orthodox Igsem, even if she had real power, if she did not put on display, under clear view, on her waist the privilege they obtained, wouldn't that be forfeiting history?"

"Hm, that is true… but in reality Yatori, no I should say all those related to Igsem, are allowed double swords isn't it so?"

"Yeah. Thus those who initially got excited were not the Igsem. After the long period of chaos… at the completion of the centralization of political and military power, while the Igsem family head was reporting of those success to the Emperor, he had at his side the two blades he considered part of his soul. But in order to establish the supremacy of 'Order' in the newly formed national army, he first had to devoid himself of his individuality.

On the other hand, the Emperor felt puzzled. Since the Emperor put a vast amount of trust in Igsem, losing the two swords that could be called a symbol of Igsem was a very serious issue. Although the Emperor tried to persuade him with various reason, the stubbornly loyal Igsem didn't show any will to compromise. As he was the monarch, the Emperor could simply order 'You shalt not discard thine swords' but giving orders with no proper reason could form cracks in their relationship. The Emperor was fret by this but in the end he did not waste efforts as he finally found an excuse."

Hearing that her Highness the Princess suddenly remembered.

"… Is that so, this is the story about the 'Undefeated Oath' right?"

"Correct. To the unwilling Igsem the Emperor said 'Although you are forfeiting your swords for the

Order, your swords have already become the honor of the Empire itself. The soldier step on the battlefield encouraged by the swords, the populace trusts the blades will defend the country so they can faithfully believe in us every day. This is obliviously the truth but you still intend to discard your swords, if this is not a disruption of Order then I don't know what is.'"

"That was a really bad argument… and it shouldn't have been generalized like that. But in those unsettling times, I guess everybody hoped there would be a Hero."

"Igsem was touched by the speech and after reflecting on it, he said so: 'Then, till these swords suffer a crushing defeat and fails to protect those it has to'. He swore to continue wielding the two swords until he is defeated in fight… this is also a strong declaration that he will definitely not enjoy the privilege of wielding two swords just because of his status."

During the lengthy conversation between the two, at the center of the room the duel finally begun. Warrant Officer Hargunska attacked first, he raised the wooden sword over his head and swung it down with all his might.

"At the condition of being undefeated, the existence of Igsem's double swords is allowed in the military, so it actually is a showpiece. It is a simple premise of incredible strength. If a Igsem want to succeed in having two swords at their waist, then they have to demonstrate to everybody the fact that they are the strongest."

Yatori who sidestepped the enemy's attack is for the moment only focusing on defense.

This is also a tacit understanding, if you truly are the strongest then there would be no need to rush in determining the winner.

To undertake all of enemy's ability and then beautifully defeat the opponent. In a duel this approach is the only allowed one for an Igsem.

"Not all Igsem descendant possessed such strong spirit. Since 'Undefeated Oath' is renewed every

generation…. the ones who could keep the two swords at waist from their coming of age to the end of their life, even if you were to count the entirety of Igsem's family tree, could be counted on your fingers."

Although warrant officer Hargunska successfully performed an attack, his face still showed anxiety. That was a normal reaction as Yatori who received his fierce attack did not strike back. Even so, the position of the two hardly changed from their initial standing.

"Princess, you should have already seen this during the incident with Captain Ison– but it is a rare opportunity, please enjoy the spectacle… the rare incarnation of an undefeated person, the so called Igsem."

Klang! At the ring of this crisp sound, the wooden sword in Warrant Officer Hargunska's hand disappeared. Even if only a handful of people grasped the moment the sword flew, everyone raised their head to see the result of her action.

Chatter spread among the spectators– as the missing wooden sword is stabbed directly in the ceiling above.

"That surely can be called fortitude of the sword. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to exchange blows with you Warrant Officer Hargunska."

The winner, Yatori, started praising her opponent first. Even though it was just a step away from being considered sarcasm, Hargunska himself understood Yatori's intentions.

Grasping the exact instant the wooden sword was about to be swung down, an upward hit carefully aimed at the hilt, such divine technique used the impact to make him lose grip. As for how far the sword would flew, it depended on how much upstream force there was. Thus by making the sword stuck on the ceiling proved not only she defeated the opponent but also the incredible strength she possessed.

“….. Brilliant, Yatorishino Igsem!”

Even with such landslide victory she has not insulting the opponent. This noble attitude would make even the loser feel admiration. Warrant Officer Hargunska, without even realizing it, stretched his right hand, Yatori also replied to the handshake with a smile.

The outcome of such impeccable duel made the public very excited. People flocked toward Yatori and the circle formed to observe the match quickly dissolved.

Ikta who stayed out of the crowd murmured with a blank face to the scene:

“That’s for safeguarding the current imperial system. Because she truly believes in your capability, princess, that she risked her life protecting you.”

“………..”

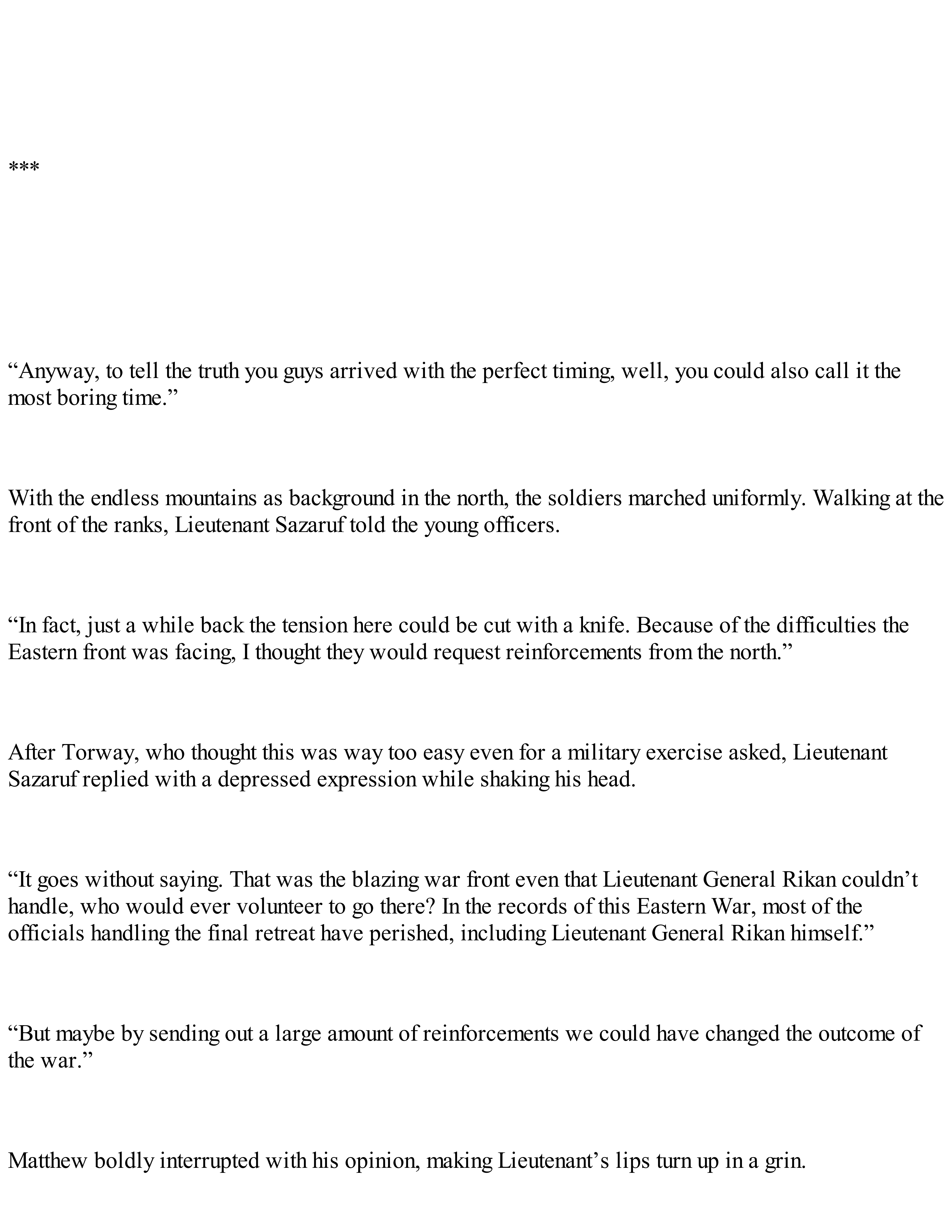
“Please don’t forget this fact, princess. No matter how big your dreams are, please absolutely never forget this.”

Maybe because he couldn’t stand watching Yatori being pushed around, Ikta after concluding the conversation stood up and calmly, with little efforts, mixed together with the officers surrounding her.

The princess while thinking about the warning she just received, walked back to the seat of honor with a serious expression.

“…. I feel like the newcomers this year are all freaks.”

The ignored Lieutenant Sazaruf could only put out this thought.



***

“Anyway, to tell the truth you guys arrived with the perfect timing, well, you could also call it the most boring time.”

With the endless mountains as background in the north, the soldiers marched uniformly. Walking at the front of the ranks, Lieutenant Sazaruf told the young officers.

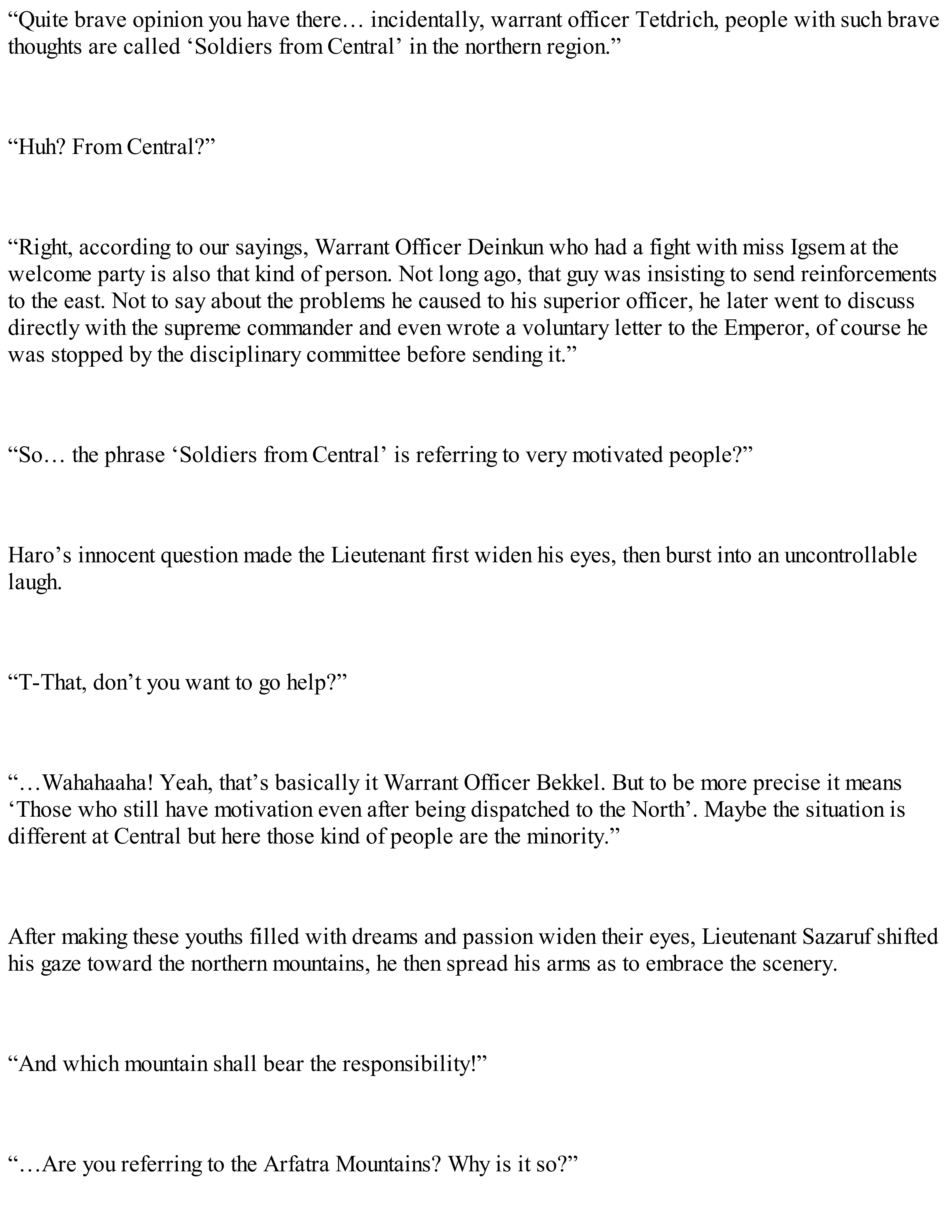
“In fact, just a while back the tension here could be cut with a knife. Because of the difficulties the Eastern front was facing, I thought they would request reinforcements from the north.”

After Torway, who thought this was way too easy even for a military exercise asked, Lieutenant Sazaruf replied with a depressed expression while shaking his head.

“It goes without saying. That was the blazing war front even that Lieutenant General Rikan couldn’t handle, who would ever volunteer to go there? In the records of this Eastern War, most of the officials handling the final retreat have perished, including Lieutenant General Rikan himself.”

“But maybe by sending out a large amount of reinforcements we could have changed the outcome of the war.”

Matthew boldly interrupted with his opinion, making Lieutenant’s lips turn up in a grin.


“Quite brave opinion you have there… incidentally, warrant officer Tetdrich, people with such brave thoughts are called ‘Soldiers from Central’ in the northern region.”

“Huh? From Central?”

“Right, according to our sayings, Warrant Officer Deinkun who had a fight with miss Igsem at the welcome party is also that kind of person. Not long ago, that guy was insisting to send reinforcements to the east. Not to say about the problems he caused to his superior officer, he later went to discuss directly with the supreme commander and even wrote a voluntary letter to the Emperor, of course he was stopped by the disciplinary committee before sending it.”

“So… the phrase ‘Soldiers from Central’ is referring to very motivated people?”

Haro’s innocent question made the Lieutenant first widen his eyes, then burst into an uncontrollable laugh.

“T-That, don’t you want to go help?”

“…Wahahaaha! Yeah, that’s basically it Warrant Officer Bekkel. But to be more precise it means ‘Those who still have motivation even after being dispatched to the North’. Maybe the situation is different at Central but here those kind of people are the minority.”

After making these youths filled with dreams and passion widen their eyes, Lieutenant Sazaruf shifted his gaze toward the northern mountains, he then spread his arms as to embrace the scenery.

“And which mountain shall bear the responsibility!”

“…Are you referring to the Arfatra Mountains? Why is it so?”

"Do you even need to ask? Because those mountains will block the enemies in front of us."

Lieutenant Sazaruf confidently made this assertion, but the young officers' faces were caught in a surprised frown.

"'Grand Arfatra is 'God's ladder'… In 900 years of Katjvarna Empire's history never once as an enemy crossed those mountains to attack…so the name 'God's ladder' originated because of that."

"You are totally right Warrant Officer Remeon. It's a shame, if I were an instructor I would draw you a flower circle."

Tl note: in japan flowers are drawn on the test paper of children who scored the maximum

"Uhm… isn't Lieutenant our standing instructor here?"

"What? Is it so? Then let's really draw you a flower circle."

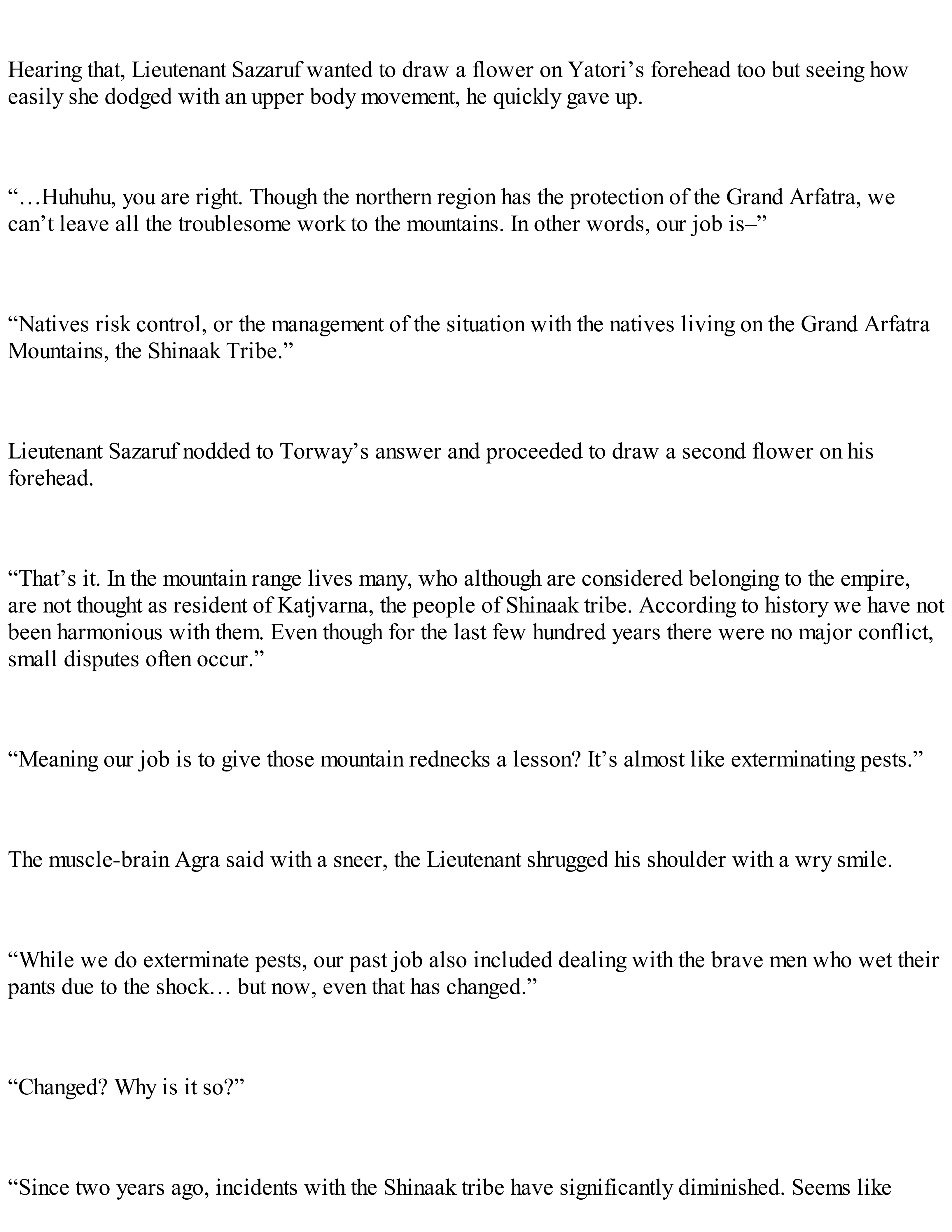
Tl note: image

Saying that, Lieutenant took out a pen from his breast pocket and drew a flower on Torway's forehead.

A laughter busted around him and Torway was left with an expression hard to describe.

"Even if enemies haven't crossed the god's ladder, there are people living over there right?"

Yatori who was silent until not interrupted with a sharp tone.



Hearing that, Lieutenant Sazaruf wanted to draw a flower on Yatori's forehead too but seeing how easily she dodged with an upper body movement, he quickly gave up.

"…Huhuhu, you are right. Though the northern region has the protection of the Grand Arfatra, we can't leave all the troublesome work to the mountains. In other words, our job is–"

"Natives risk control, or the management of the situation with the natives living on the Grand Arfatra Mountains, the Shinaak Tribe."

Lieutenant Sazaruf nodded to Torway's answer and proceeded to draw a second flower on his forehead.

"That's it. In the mountain range lives many, who although are considered belonging to the empire, are not thought as resident of Katjvarna, the people of Shinaak tribe. According to history we have not been harmonious with them. Even though for the last few hundred years there were no major conflict, small disputes often occur."

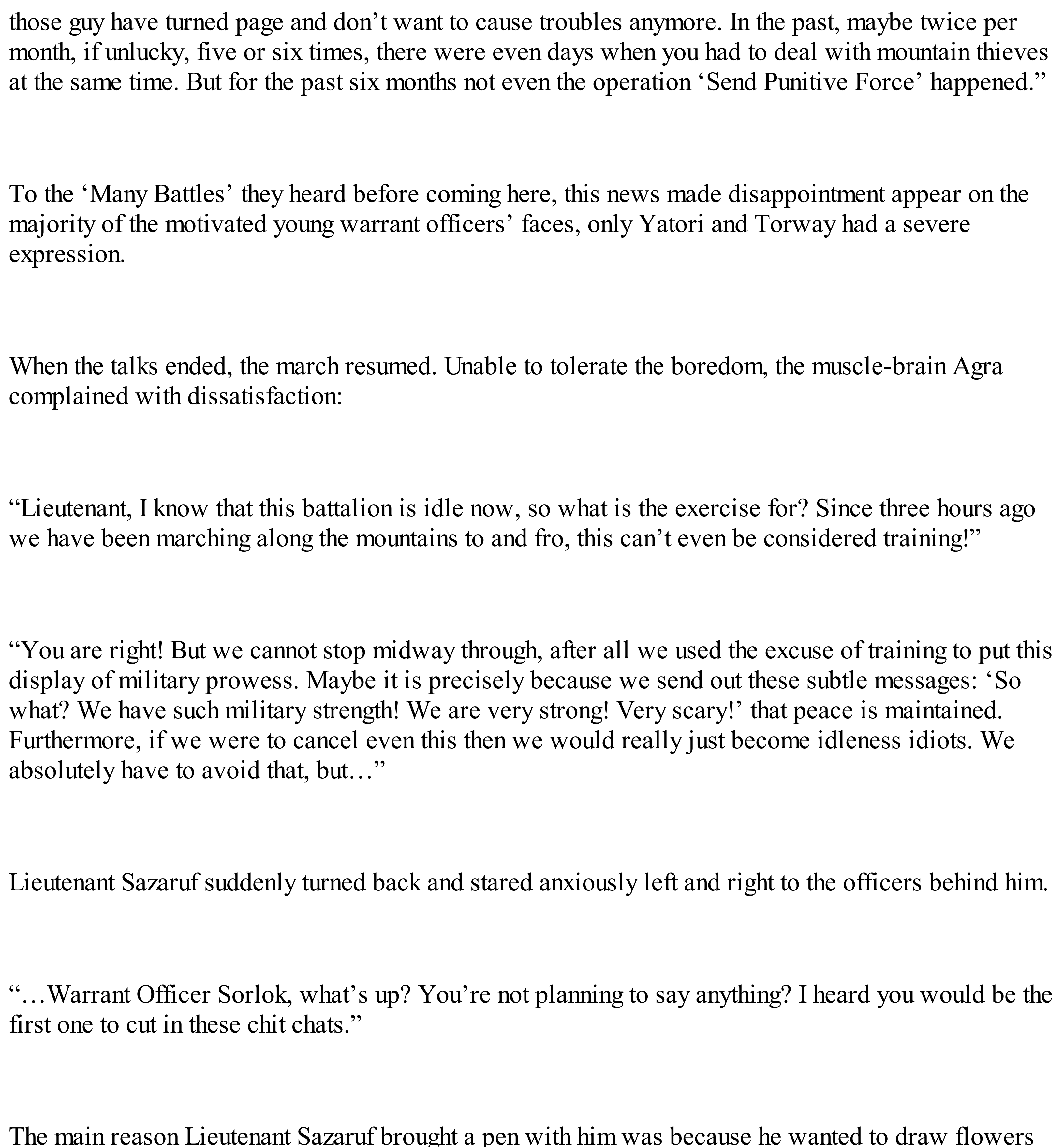
"Meaning our job is to give those mountain rednecks a lesson? It's almost like exterminating pests."

The muscle-brain Agra said with a sneer, the Lieutenant shrugged his shoulder with a wry smile.

"While we do exterminate pests, our past job also included dealing with the brave men who wet their pants due to the shock… but now, even that has changed."

"Changed? Why is it so?"

"Since two years ago, incidents with the Shinaak tribe have significantly diminished. Seems like



those guy have turned page and don't want to cause troubles anymore. In the past, maybe twice per month, if unlucky, five or six times, there were even days when you had to deal with mountain thieves at the same time. But for the past six months not even the operation 'Send Punitive Force' happened."

To the 'Many Battles' they heard before coming here, this news made disappointment appear on the majority of the motivated young warrant officers' faces, only Yatori and Torway had a severe expression.

When the talks ended, the march resumed. Unable to tolerate the boredom, the muscle-brain Agra complained with dissatisfaction:

"Lieutenant, I know that this battalion is idle now, so what is the exercise for? Since three hours ago we have been marching along the mountains to and fro, this can't even be considered training!"

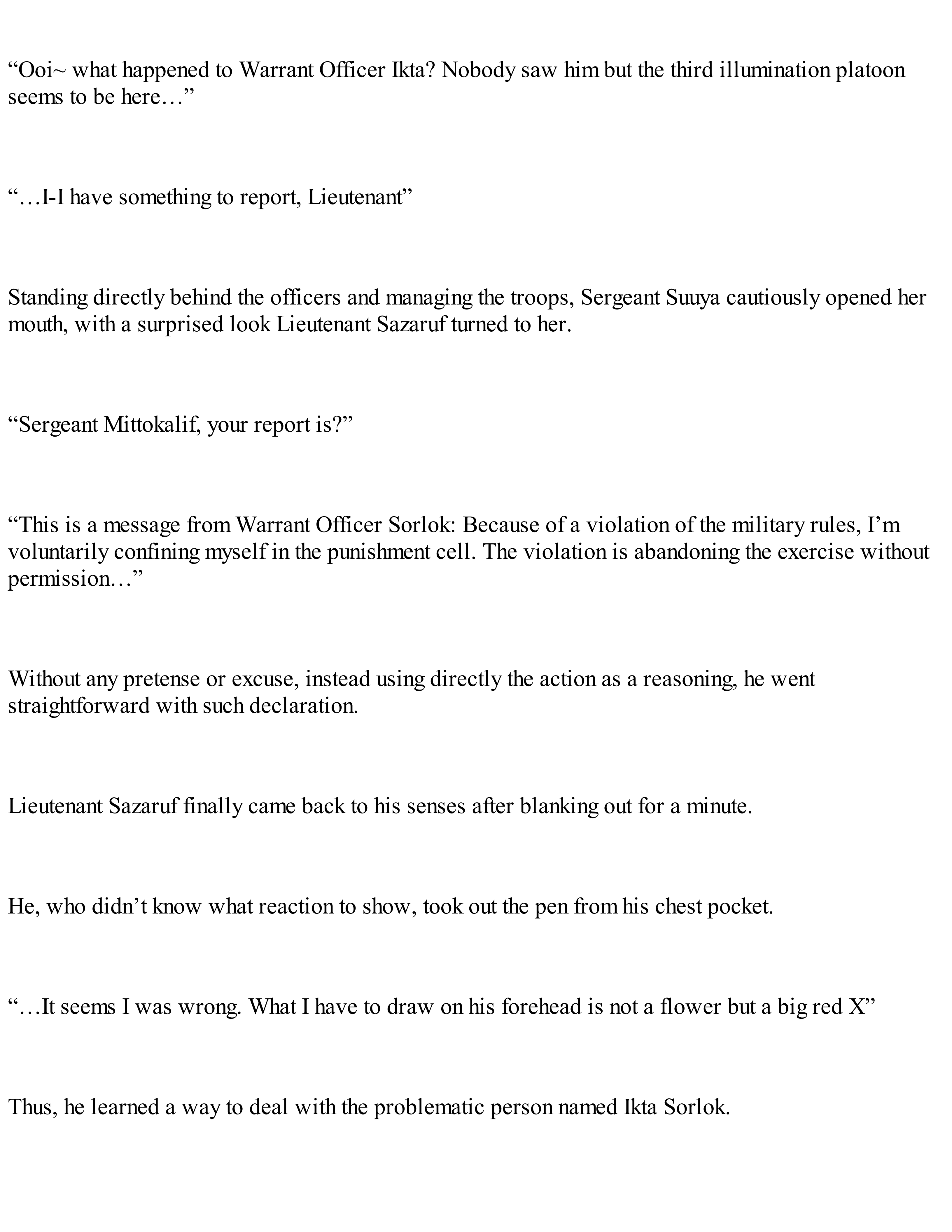
"You are right! But we cannot stop midway through, after all we used the excuse of training to put this display of military prowess. Maybe it is precisely because we send out these subtle messages: 'So what? We have such military strength! We are very strong! Very scary!' that peace is maintained. Furthermore, if we were to cancel even this then we would really just become idleness idiots. We absolutely have to avoid that, but…"

Lieutenant Sazaruf suddenly turned back and stared anxiously left and right to the officers behind him.

"…Warrant Officer Sorlok, what's up? You're not planning to say anything? I heard you would be the first one to cut in these chit chats."

The main reason Lieutenant Sazaruf brought a pen with him was because he wanted to draw flowers circles on Ikta's forehead, but no traces of the rookie could be found.

The members of 'Order of Knights' knew it since long ago but the other officers had only now noticed it and the commotion further spread.



“Ooi~ what happened to Warrant Officer Ikta? Nobody saw him but the third illumination platoon seems to be here…”

“…I-I have something to report, Lieutenant”

Standing directly behind the officers and managing the troops, Sergeant Suuya cautiously opened her mouth, with a surprised look Lieutenant Sazaruf turned to her.

“Sergeant Mittokalif, your report is?”

“This is a message from Warrant Officer Sorlok: Because of a violation of the military rules, I’m voluntarily confining myself in the punishment cell. The violation is abandoning the exercise without permission…”

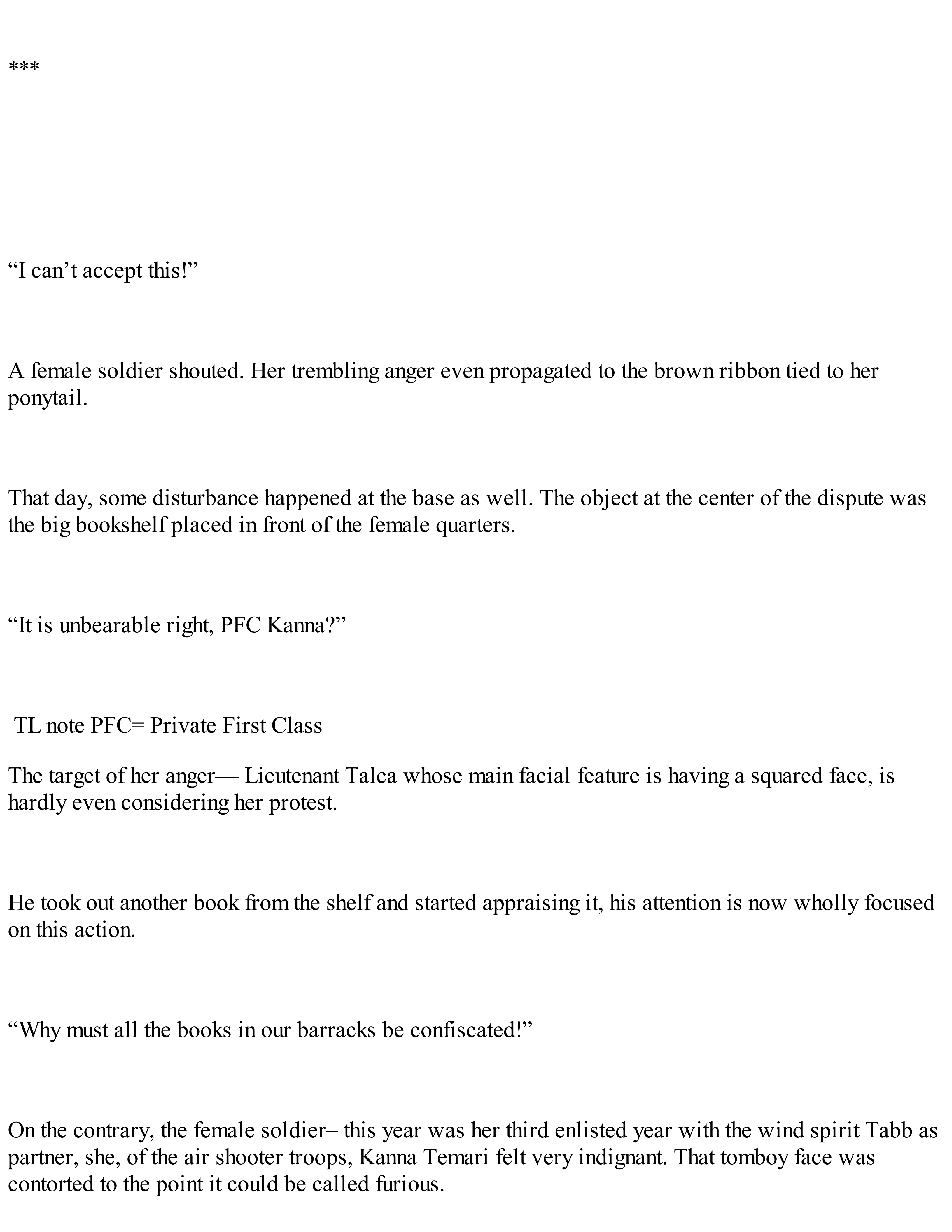
Without any pretense or excuse, instead using directly the action as a reasoning, he went straightforward with such declaration.

Lieutenant Sazaruf finally came back to his senses after blanking out for a minute.

He, who didn’t know what reaction to show, took out the pen from his chest pocket.

“…It seems I was wrong. What I have to draw on his forehead is not a flower but a big red X”

Thus, he learned a way to deal with the problematic person named Ikta Sorlok.



***

“I can’t accept this!”

A female soldier shouted. Her trembling anger even propagated to the brown ribbon tied to her ponytail.

That day, some disturbance happened at the base as well. The object at the center of the dispute was the big bookshelf placed in front of the female quarters.

“It is unbearable right, PFC Kanna?”

TL note PFC= Private First Class

The target of her anger— Lieutenant Talca whose main facial feature is having a squared face, is hardly even considering her protest.

He took out another book from the shelf and started appraising it, his attention is now wholly focused on this action.

“Why must all the books in our barracks be confiscated!”

On the contrary, the female soldier– this year was her third enlisted year with the wind spirit Tabb as partner, she, of the air shooter troops, Kanna Temari felt very indignant. That tomboy face was contorted to the point it could be called furious.



She was not a recruit and knew well that going against a superior officer brought no benefit. But to her, the current situation was a moment she had to talk back even fully knowing that.

“Then I ask you, why should we cram the soldiers’ sleeping place with bookshelves full of books?”

Lieutenant Talca replied with in a cold tone, after gathering all her strength, Kanna replied.

“Because the people living here read books when they are free from training! Because having a lot of books is great but they cost a lot, so everybody put their property in one place as shared property, you should understand that!”

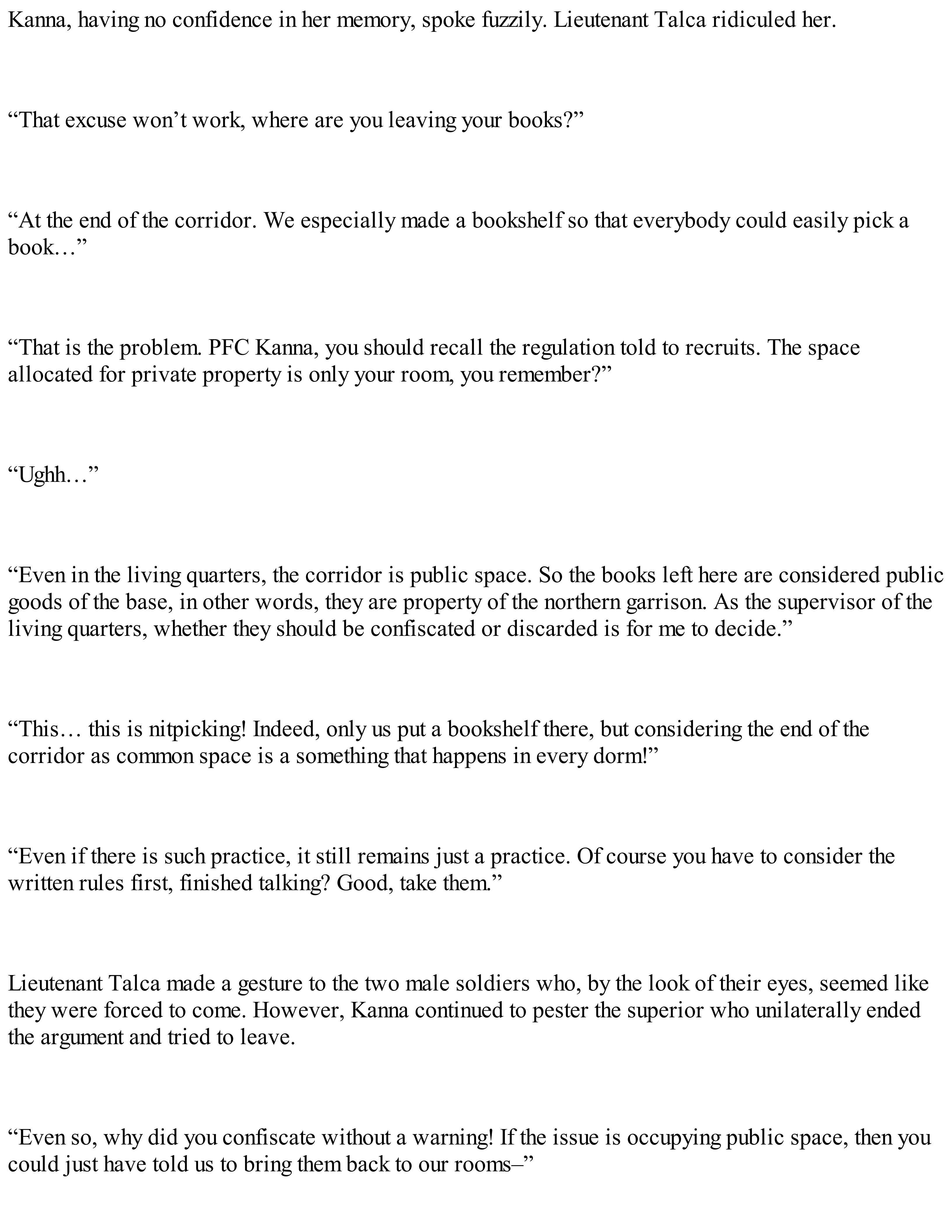
“It is, please understand that, right? No matter how much time passes you never learn how to be polite.”

“Guh! Don’t try… please don’t try to change to topic, we are now discussing the matter regarding these books!”

Other female soldiers also showed their face from the windows of the barrack, nervously observing the situation from the sidelines. Though sharing the same opinion as Kanna that the confiscation was unfair, they couldn’t muster the courage to go against a superior officer.

“Sigh, so you are claiming ownership of these books as your private property?”

“It can be regarded as such. Although not so much as private property, in fact it is shared property among everybody living here… and there should be no military regulation against bringing in books, right?”



Kanna, having no confidence in her memory, spoke fuzzily. Lieutenant Talca ridiculed her.

“That excuse won’t work, where are you leaving your books?”

“At the end of the corridor. We especially made a bookshelf so that everybody could easily pick a book…”

“That is the problem. PFC Kanna, you should recall the regulation told to recruits. The space allocated for private property is only your room, you remember?”

“Ughh…”

“Even in the living quarters, the corridor is public space. So the books left here are considered public goods of the base, in other words, they are property of the northern garrison. As the supervisor of the living quarters, whether they should be confiscated or discarded is for me to decide.”

“This… this is nitpicking! Indeed, only us put a bookshelf there, but considering the end of the corridor as common space is a something that happens in every dorm!”

“Even if there is such practice, it still remains just a practice. Of course you have to consider the written rules first, finished talking? Good, take them.”

Lieutenant Talca made a gesture to the two male soldiers who, by the look of their eyes, seemed like they were forced to come. However, Kanna continued to pester the superior who unilaterally ended the argument and tried to leave.

“Even so, why did you confiscate without a warning! If the issue is occupying public space, then you could just have told us to bring them back to our rooms–”

“…Tsk! Ooi! Is that the attitude you should have when talking to a superior officer?”

Lieutenant Talca shouted with a tone completely different from the previous indifferent attitude, which scared Kanna so much that she forgot to breath.

“A mere soldier dares to be so arrogant, before talking irrationally think about your standing! The ones who broke the regulation were you, as a supervisor I have to take measures for it. In moment like this you should not be telling excuses but self-reflecting! Isn’t it so!”

Compared to looking down on people, Lieutenant Talca who is now forcing others to accept his own justice made Kanna grit her teeth as she was unable to defend herself. Shrinking when the superior officer is yelling was already a conditioned reflex instilled in soldiers.

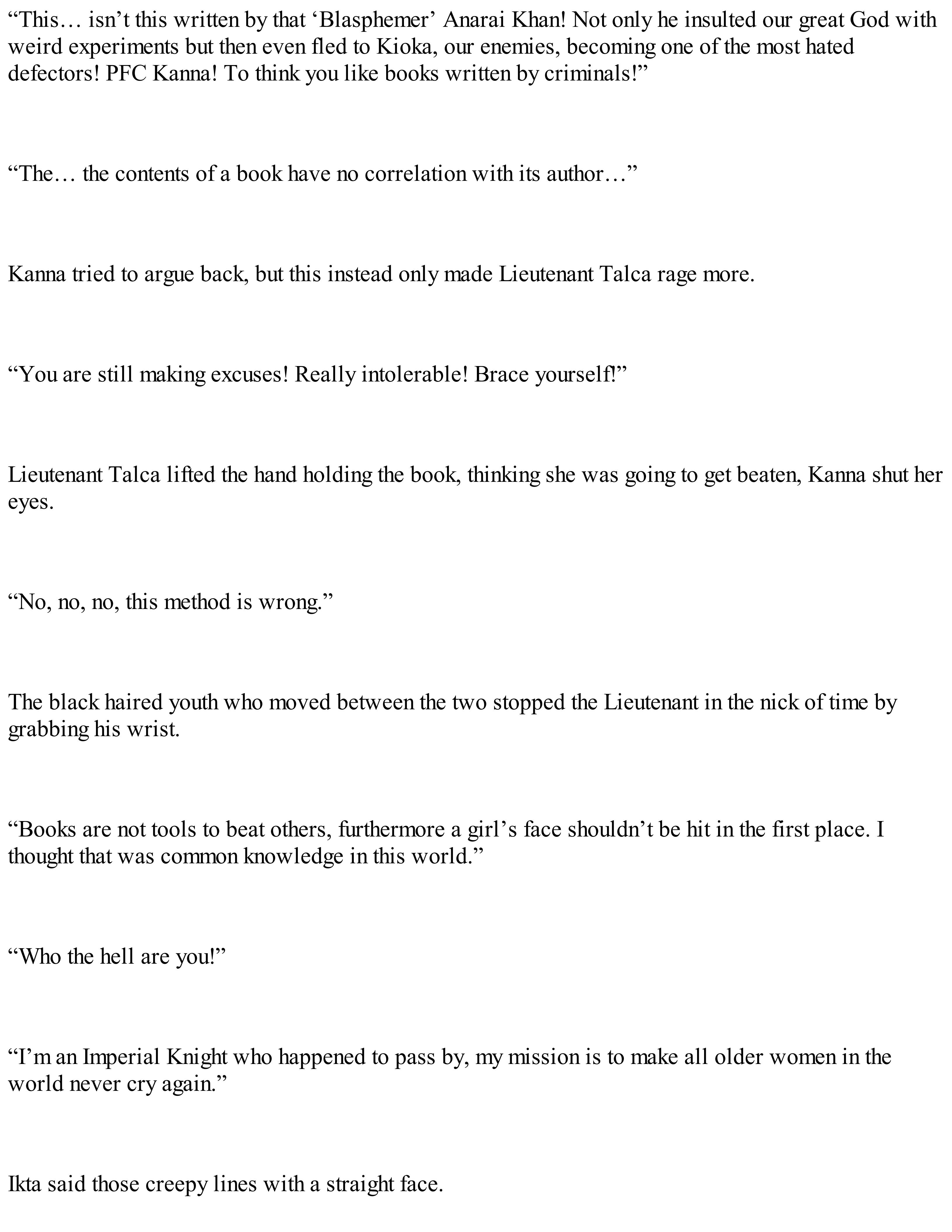
“Moreover, reading is an entertainment of the rich, this interest to you, foot soldiers, are just not knowing your own places! Since you have time to read such stupid entertainment why don’t you increase your stamina by running laps! Really, this kind of boring stuff…”

Lieutenant Talca while speaking with disdain, took out an old looking book from the bookshelf. Seeing that cover, Kanna’s face paled.

“W-wait! Don’t be so rough!”

“Hmm, seeing your panicking expression, is this your book? <Records of Grand Arfatra>? I noticed this because the binding looked luxurious…huh? Where have I seen this author before…?”

Lieutenant Talca frowned his eyebrows in thinking, a few seconds later he breathed out with upturned eyes.


“This… isn’t this written by that ‘Blasphemer’ Anarai Khan! Not only he insulted our great God with weird experiments but then even fled to Kioka, our enemies, becoming one of the most hated defectors! PFC Kanna! To think you like books written by criminals!”

“The… the contents of a book have no correlation with its author…”

Kanna tried to argue back, but this instead only made Lieutenant Talca rage more.

“You are still making excuses! Really intolerable! Brace yourself!”

Lieutenant Talca lifted the hand holding the book, thinking she was going to get beaten, Kanna shut her eyes.

“No, no, no, this method is wrong.”

The black haired youth who moved between the two stopped the Lieutenant in the nick of time by grabbing his wrist.

“Books are not tools to beat others, furthermore a girl’s face shouldn’t be hit in the first place. I thought that was common knowledge in this world.”

“Who the hell are you!”

“I’m an Imperial Knight who happened to pass by, my mission is to make all older women in the world never cry again.”

Ikta said those creepy lines with a straight face.

Lieutenant Talca frowned.

"Imperial Knight… so you are a member of the legendary 'Order of Knights'? The name of the black haired black eyed guy should be Ikta Sorlok correct… you didn't seem very conspicuous at the welcome party."

"It's because I'm not good at attracting attention, even though I look like this, I'm pretty humble."

"Then, what's the meaning of your right hand?"

Lieutenant Talca fiercely stared, Ikta then simply released the grip suppressing the other's hand.

"I apologize for intervening without authorization in the dispute, but after hearing your conversation so far, I'm feeling quite concerned about something."

Ikta moved to the bookshelf while saying so and looked with memorable interest at the books lined there.

"…Oh the ordering of this bookshelf is not bad at all. Fictional novels and specialized books are separated according to their genre, although there are old books none of them are in bad condition, the residents must all be careful readers."

"So what–"

"Since the invention of letter pressing technology, compared to the past where books were handwritten, books have become an existence much closer to people. Coupled with an increase in literacy, the reading demographic spread to the general population."

Ikta interrupted the Lieutenant with swaggerish statements while ignoring him, this thick nerved attitude made Kanna speechless.

“Having said so, books are still not commodities that could be thoughtlessly purchased. It may be different in twenty years’ time, but right now the limit should be ‘spurge to buy one at a special occasion’… but since this is the case, sellers also devised various strategies.”

Ikta selected two books from the shelf and raised them with his hands.

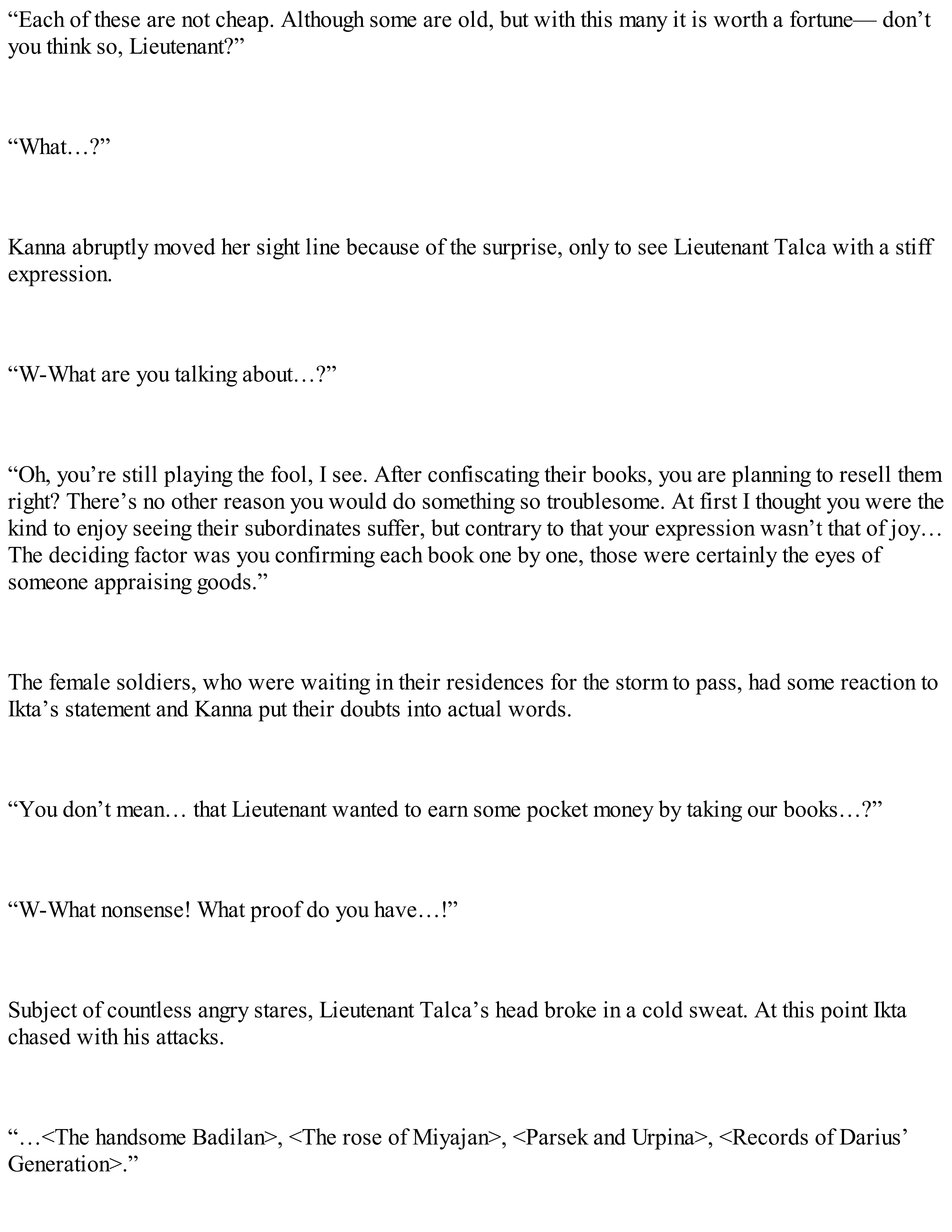
“On the cover of this <Flower girl Lisrei> is written ‘a gift to your dearest daughter’, this <Yobzniek’s Knight> has ‘given to the son who will be braver than anyone else’. One can tell with a glance alone that these lines have nothing to do with the story, it’s just propaganda to promote sales. The focus here should be ‘parents who buy book for their children’ as the main target of sales.

The important product itself is a good fit for this strategy. No matter whether it is <Flower Girl Lisrei> or <Yobzniek’s Knight>, the protagonist was always the kind that would make parents think ‘It would be great if my child could become someone like that’. But if you think about it calmly you will find different aspects in which they are just too perfect.”

Ikta exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulder, then continued talking.

“Within the scope of my knowledge, the pioneering books that used such strategies are these two. Then, many other works successfully adopted the same concept thus making the notion of books in the Empire become: ‘For the coming of age of their children, one must spurge in buying a pricey book’. The end result of such epidemic thinking is nowadays, the only property many youths have, is the one book their parents gifted them.”

After leading the discourse here, Ikta suddenly knocked lightly on the bookshelf while exposing a smile with deeper meanings.



“Each of these are not cheap. Although some are old, but with this many it is worth a fortune— don’t you think so, Lieutenant?”

“What…?”

Kanna abruptly moved her sight line because of the surprise, only to see Lieutenant Talca with a stiff expression.

“W-What are you talking about…?”

“Oh, you’re still playing the fool, I see. After confiscating their books, you are planning to resell them right? There’s no other reason you would do something so troublesome. At first I thought you were the kind to enjoy seeing their subordinates suffer, but contrary to that your expression wasn’t that of joy… The deciding factor was you confirming each book one by one, those were certainly the eyes of someone appraising goods.”

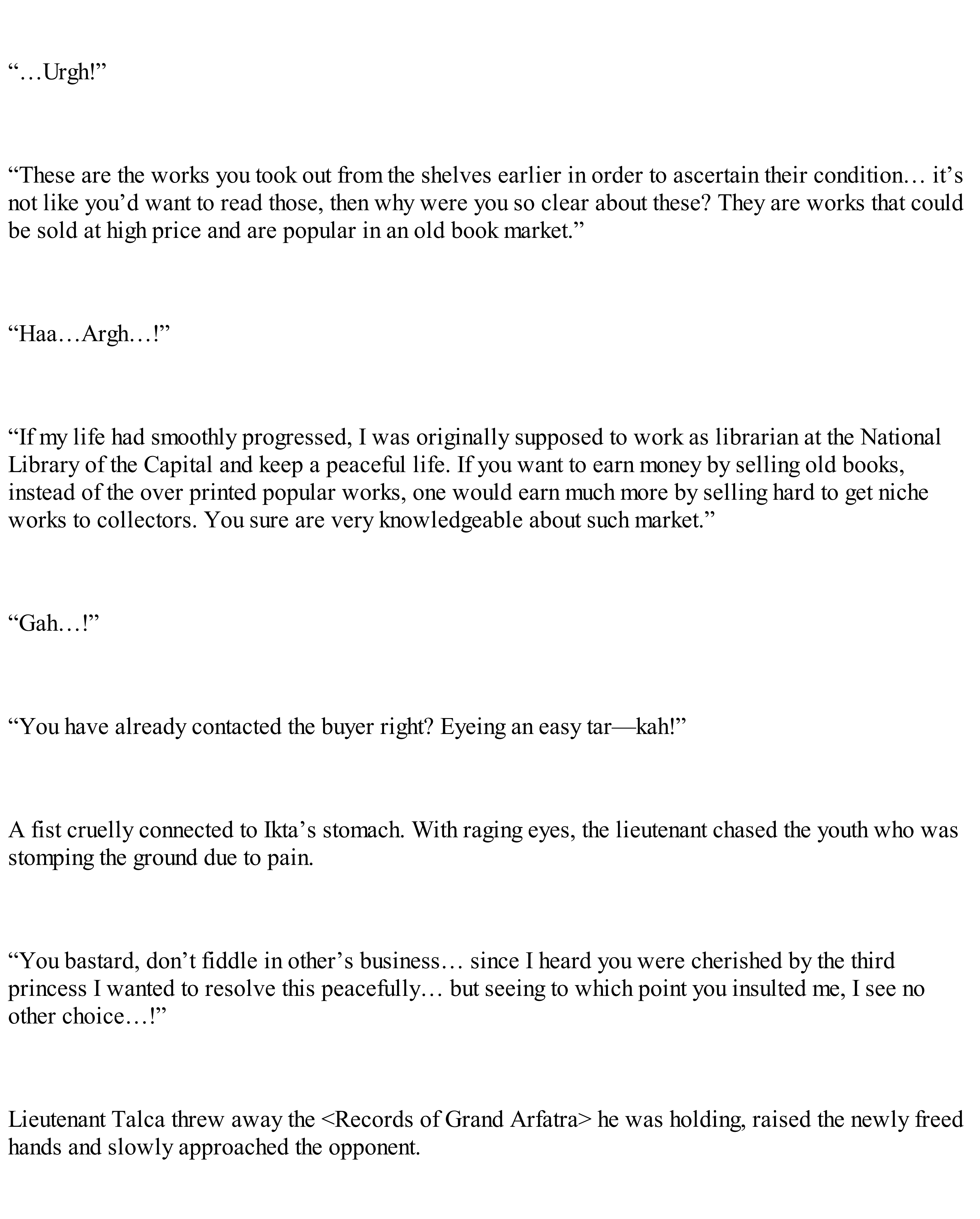
The female soldiers, who were waiting in their residences for the storm to pass, had some reaction to Ikta’s statement and Kanna put their doubts into actual words.

“You don’t mean… that Lieutenant wanted to earn some pocket money by taking our books…?”

“W-What nonsense! What proof do you have…!”

Subject of countless angry stares, Lieutenant Talca’s head broke in a cold sweat. At this point Ikta chased with his attacks.

“…<The handsome Badilan>, <The rose of Miyajan>, <Parsek and Urpina>, <Records of Darius’ Generation>.”



"…Urgh!"

"These are the works you took out from the shelves earlier in order to ascertain their condition… it's not like you'd want to read those, then why were you so clear about these? They are works that could be sold at high price and are popular in an old book market."

"Haa…Argh…!"

"If my life had smoothly progressed, I was originally supposed to work as librarian at the National Library of the Capital and keep a peaceful life. If you want to earn money by selling old books, instead of the over printed popular works, one would earn much more by selling hard to get niche works to collectors. You sure are very knowledgeable about such market."

"Gah…!"

"You have already contacted the buyer right? Eyeing an easy tar—kah!"

A fist cruelly connected to Ikta's stomach. With raging eyes, the lieutenant chased the youth who was stomping the ground due to pain.

"You bastard, don't fiddle in other's business… since I heard you were cherished by the third princess I wanted to resolve this peacefully… but seeing to which point you insulted me, I see no other choice…!"

Lieutenant Talca threw away the <Records of Grand Arfatra> he was holding, raised the newly freed hands and slowly approached the opponent.

Ikta retreated while coughing.

“Cough cough… gosh turning to violence so easily, please listen till I finish talking.”

“You’re on your deathbed, keep saying all the bullshit you want!”

Ikta while avoiding Lieutenant’s hands, still sprouted words.

“Yes, yes, yes, since you said so I won’t restrain myself anymore— what I really wanted Lieutenant to understand is that the value of books is not only ‘entertainment of the rich’. Now please allow me to demonstrate it to you.”

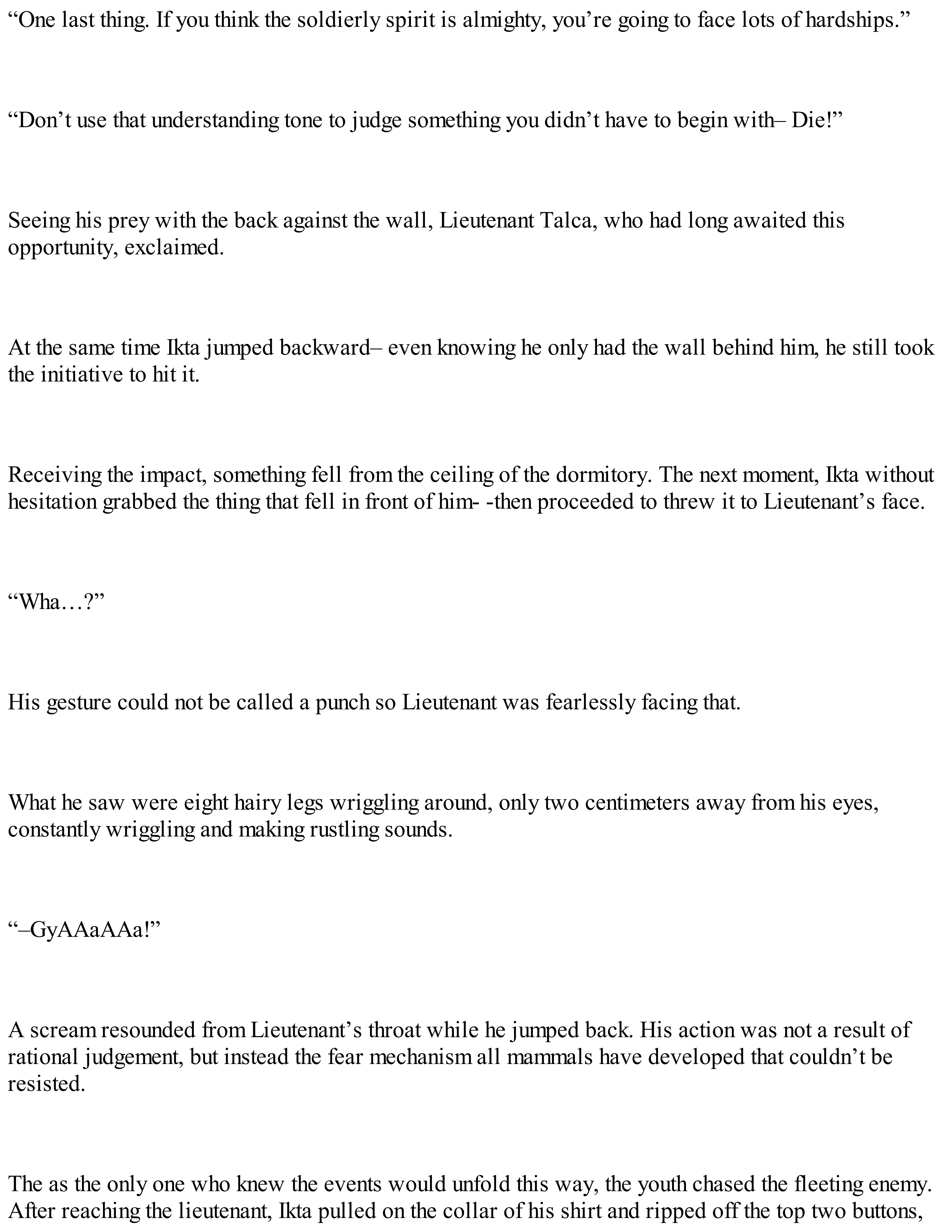
“You can prove it while I hit your face to deformity?”

“The books will teach me the strength to not fall into that predicament, anyway this a bit sudden but allow me to ask you a question Lieutenant. Do you like insects? Or do you hate them?”

“I never considered whether I liked them, since mere insects are just bugs… If I sighted any, I could just stomp on it.”

“Oyaoya that’s really forthright. But you know, in this world there are all kinds of insects, some fly in the sky, some can move really fast, some have extremely powerful venom too. Without any preparation would you be able to confront such threats?”

Even during these conversations, the lieutenant continued cornering Ikta toward the wall. Kanna thought of intruding and stopping them before blood is shed, but halted after the youth who was getting cornered sent her a rejecting look.



“One last thing. If you think the soldierly spirit is almighty, you’re going to face lots of hardships.”

“Don’t use that understanding tone to judge something you didn’t have to begin with– Die!”

Seeing his prey with the back against the wall, Lieutenant Talca, who had long awaited this opportunity, exclaimed.

At the same time Ikta jumped backward– even knowing he only had the wall behind him, he still took the initiative to hit it.

Receiving the impact, something fell from the ceiling of the dormitory. The next moment, Ikta without hesitation grabbed the thing that fell in front of him- -then proceeded to threw it to Lieutenant’s face.

“Wha…?”

His gesture could not be called a punch so Lieutenant was fearlessly facing that.

What he saw were eight hairy legs wriggling around, only two centimeters away from his eyes, constantly wriggling and making rustling sounds.

“–GyAAaAAa!”

A scream resounded from Lieutenant’s throat while he jumped back. His action was not a result of rational judgement, but instead the fear mechanism all mammals have developed that couldn’t be resisted.

The as the only one who knew the events would unfold this way, the youth chased the fleeting enemy. After reaching the lieutenant, Ikta pulled on the collar of his shirt and ripped off the top two buttons,



then taking advantage of the gap created in the shirt he, in one swift action, threw in ‘that thing’ he held in his right hand.

The lieutenant clearly saw what that was.

“GuaAaAaaaaaaAA!”

He panicked. No, it’s not enough to describe it with panic alone, he frenzied. Lieutenant Talca desperately reached into the shirt but ‘that thing’ with extreme agility avoided his hands by moving left and right. Hearing rustling sounds and feeling hairy arthropod legs crawling around your skin can make your reason disappear in an instant.

Endless screams came from the Lieutenant.

The more he tried to reach with his hands in order to get it out, the deeper it went. During the struggle, unknowingly how it did it, that thing actually went into his pants. Feeling that hairy touch, the initial fear that was meant as a defense mechanism erupted from each pore of his body. The lieutenant with painful screams continued to hit his whole body.

Facing the unreal crazed scenery, the female soldiers could only stare in astonishment at the Lieutenant’s actions.

“GuaAaAaaaaaaAA!UghaaRg!GyAAaAAa!!!”

Nobody knew how long such battle lasted… whether it was seconds or minutes or even more.

Then when Lieutenant forfeited all resistance to his dignity as a soldier, that thing finally left the tight military uniform.

An eight legged shadow, about as big as an adult's hand was quickly running away on the sandy road, Ikta only saluted it till it disappeared from sight.

"Good work, you successfully completed the mission Sergeant Heteropoda Venatoria… If throwing centipedes at people is be considered a prank, then the move I did earlier must be classified as esoteric prohibition. If there's someone not afraid of that move, they must have the name Igsem…"

Ikta looked at the Lieutenant who is already lying absent minded on the ground, and continued:

"However, if you have read the book you had just thrown away… the <Records of Grand Arfatra>, you could have avoided this tragedy, after all I gave you such a big clue when I said 'Insect'. You just had to know that during the day, they like to avoid the sun by resting on ceiling and near corners… then you would have noticed I wasn't just running away but leading you to where 'that thing' was. Now you understand don't you? The value of the books I talked about earlier was referring to this, Lieutenant."

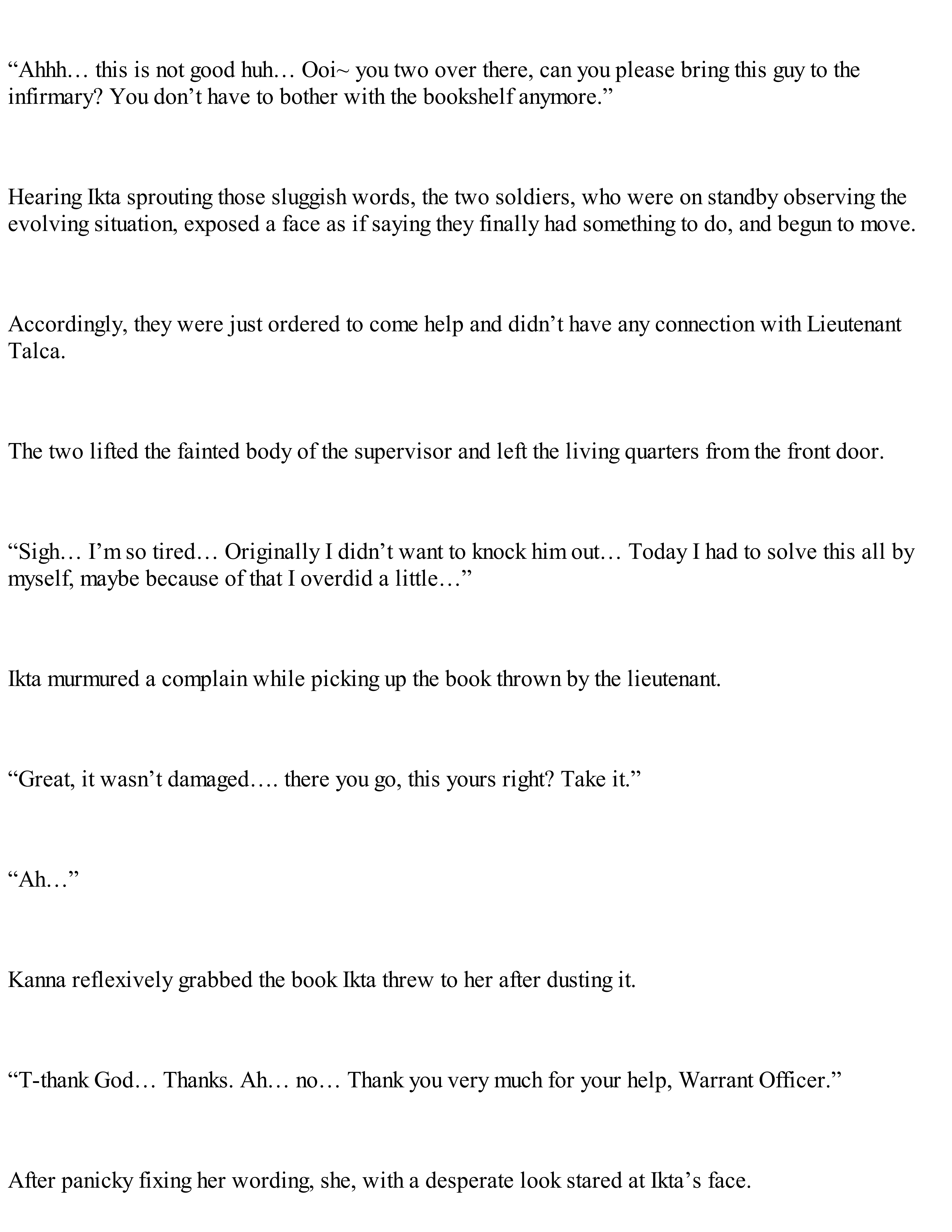
Even without knowing whether the other was listening, Ikta continued explaining.

This is the oblige of the winner.

"Although it possesses a scaring appearance, heteropoda venatoria is a very common animal. Since they protect the crops from harmful insects, lots of them are raised in Shinaak tribe's barn. They are expert hunters that predates on pest, but will not harm humans and their crop. Even with that look heteropoda venatoria is definitely a useful insect. What I just did was out of emergency, good children should no imitate."

Tl note: image, follow at your own risk

The grabbing of a spider alone, normal people wouldn't be able to do that… Kanna complained in her heart. In front of her she could see Ikta illumining Lieutenant Talca's eyes with Kusu's high beam.



“Ahhh… this is not good huh… Ooi~ you two over there, can you please bring this guy to the infirmary? You don’t have to bother with the bookshelf anymore.”

Hearing Ikta sprouting those sluggish words, the two soldiers, who were on standby observing the evolving situation, exposed a face as if saying they finally had something to do, and begun to move.

Accordingly, they were just ordered to come help and didn’t have any connection with Lieutenant Talca.

The two lifted the fainted body of the supervisor and left the living quarters from the front door.

“Sigh… I’m so tired… Originally I didn’t want to knock him out… Today I had to solve this all by myself, maybe because of that I overdid a little…”

Ikta murmured a complain while picking up the book thrown by the lieutenant.

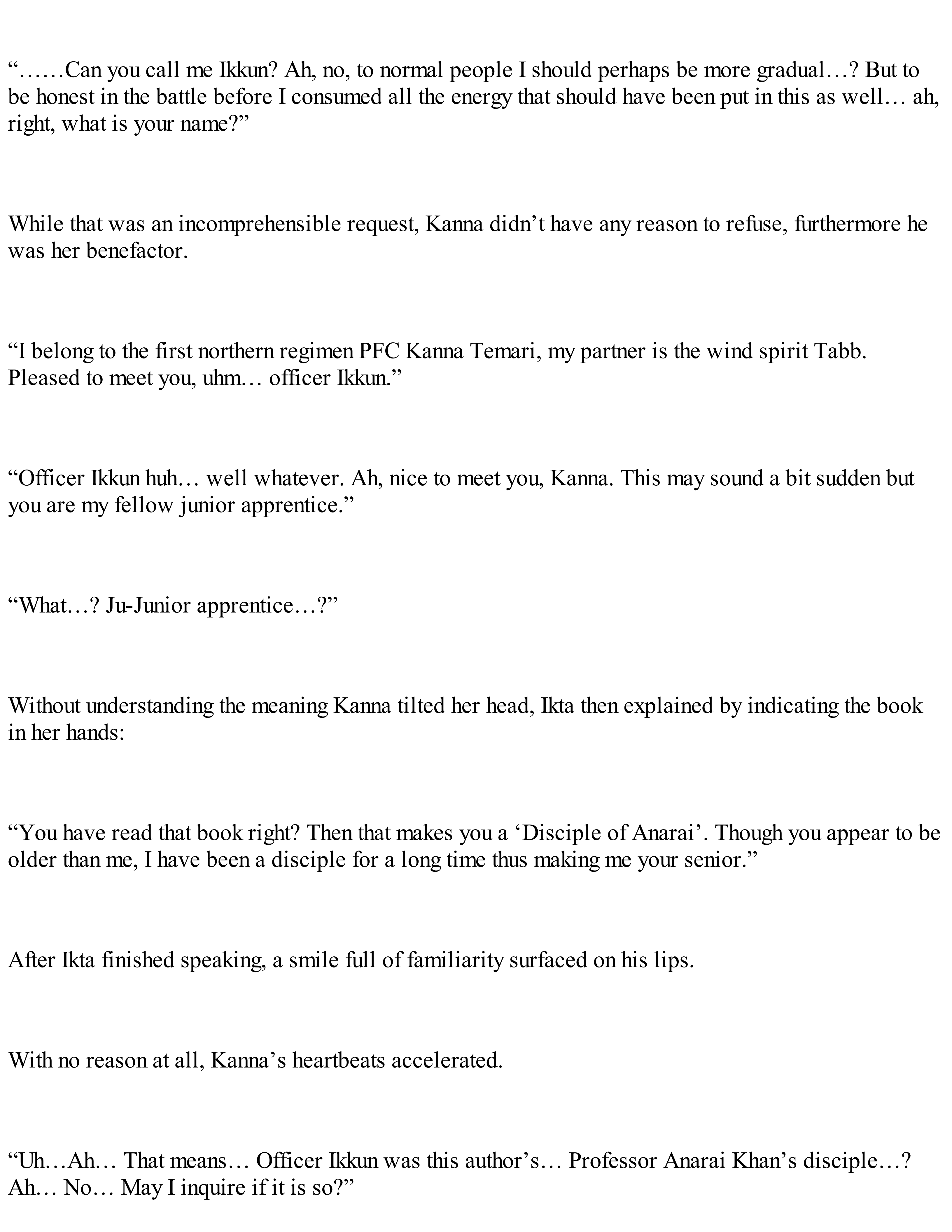
“Great, it wasn’t damaged…. there you go, this yours right? Take it.”

“Ah…”

Kanna reflexively grabbed the book Ikta threw to her after dusting it.

“T-thank God… Thanks. Ah… no… Thank you very much for your help, Warrant Officer.”

After panicky fixing her wording, she, with a desperate look stared at Ikta’s face.



“……Can you call me Ikkun? Ah, no, to normal people I should perhaps be more gradual…? But to be honest in the battle before I consumed all the energy that should have been put in this as well… ah, right, what is your name?”

While that was an incomprehensible request, Kanna didn’t have any reason to refuse, furthermore he was her benefactor.

“I belong to the first northern regimen PFC Kanna Temari, my partner is the wind spirit Tabb. Pleased to meet you, uhm… officer Ikkun.”

“Officer Ikkun huh… well whatever. Ah, nice to meet you, Kanna. This may sound a bit sudden but you are my fellow junior apprentice.”

“What…? Ju-Junior apprentice…?”

Without understanding the meaning Kanna tilted her head, Ikta then explained by indicating the book in her hands:

“You have read that book right? Then that makes you a ‘Disciple of Anarai’. Though you appear to be older than me, I have been a disciple for a long time thus making me your senior.”

After Ikta finished speaking, a smile full of familiarity surfaced on his lips.

With no reason at all, Kanna’s heartbeats accelerated.

“Uh…Ah… That means… Officer Ikkun was this author’s… Professor Anarai Khan’s disciple…? Ah… No… May I inquire if it is so?”

"Yes, it is so. You and I are both believers of Science."

Also a believer of science. Though she didn't quite understand the meaning, that remark left a deep impression in her heart.

"I say, Kanna, which part of this book you think is most interesting?"

Ikta asked in a casual tone. This kind of attitude does not show normally and it made Kanna very curious. Because this is the first time she discovered someone she could discuss something like this with.

"Ah…Umm… It should be… the part regarding the study of the Alderah church."

Ikta's shoulder shook with surprise, this was not an answer he anticipated.

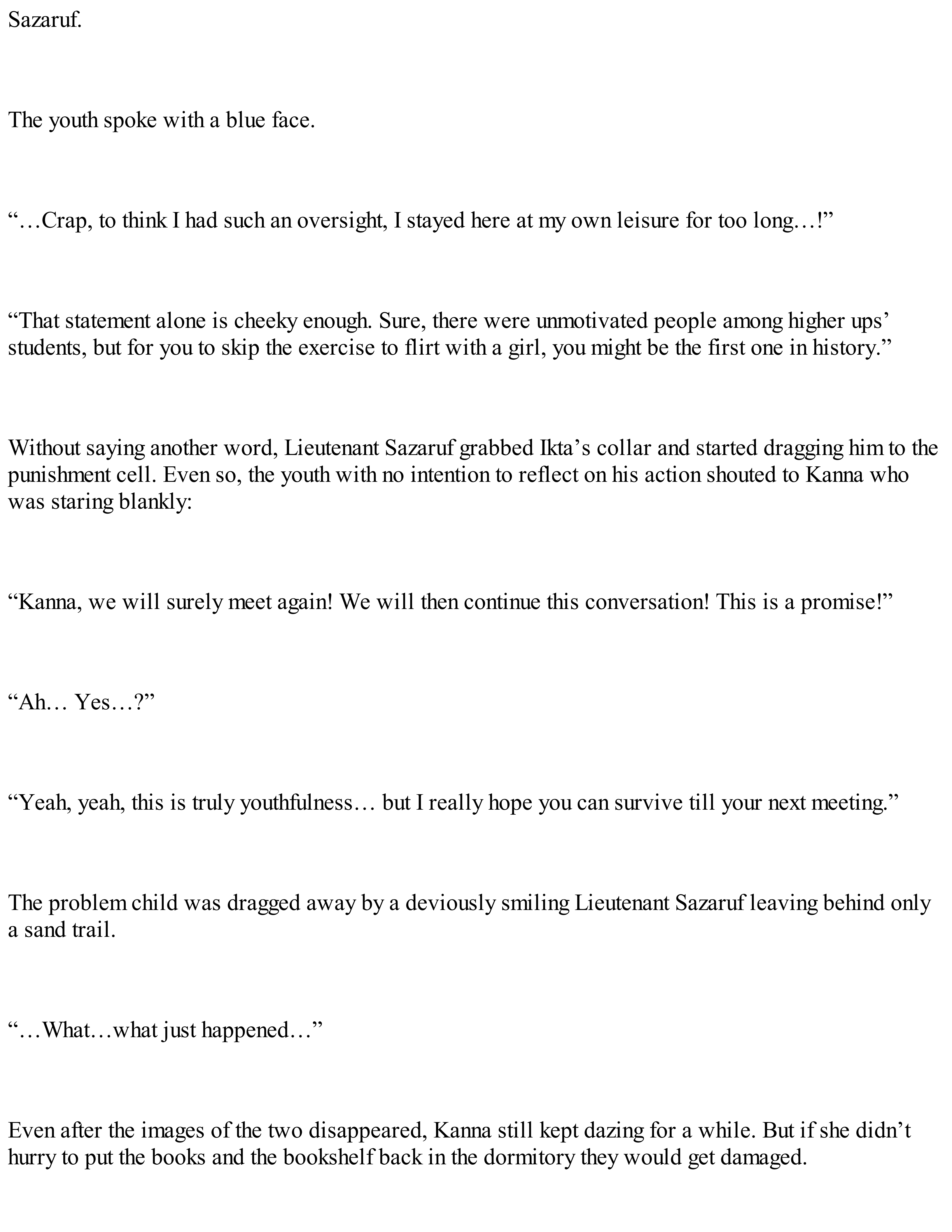
"…The studying of the Alderah church? Not the faith the Shinaak Tribe have on the spirits?"

"Ye-Yes…That is, after studying the spirit beliefs of the Shinaak and then comparing them to the Alderah faith of the Empire, you can then find all kinds of wonderful things–"

Seeing how Kanna hesitatingly begun to explain, Ikta wanted to keep listening to her–but at that instant, his head was firmly grabbed by someone from behind.

"…Weren't you supposed to be in voluntary confinement? Warrant Officer Sorlok."

Ikta timidly turned back, as expected, appearing in front of him with a twisted smile was Lieutenant


Sazaruf.

The youth spoke with a blue face.

"…Crap, to think I had such an oversight, I stayed here at my own leisure for too long…!"

"That statement alone is cheeky enough. Sure, there were unmotivated people among higher ups' students, but for you to skip the exercise to flirt with a girl, you might be the first one in history."

Without saying another word, Lieutenant Sazaruf grabbed Ikta's collar and started dragging him to the punishment cell. Even so, the youth with no intention to reflect on his action shouted to Kanna who was staring blankly:

"Kanna, we will surely meet again! We will then continue this conversation! This is a promise!"

"Ah… Yes…?"

"Yeah, yeah, this is truly youthfulness… but I really hope you can survive till your next meeting."

The problem child was dragged away by a deviously smiling Lieutenant Sazaruf leaving behind only a sand trail.

"…What…what just happened…"

Even after the images of the two disappeared, Kanna still kept dazing for a while. But if she didn't hurry to put the books and the bookshelf back in the dormitory they would get damaged.


Thus she turned around to search for someone who would help carry the shelf. Right then a strong gust of wind blew laterally making the pages of the <Records of Grand Arfatra> in her hands turn pages after pages. The turnings finally stopped when they reached the book's cover, on the first page there was a sentence to the prospect reader, a message left there by the author.

–Welcome to the world of Science!

These words were like what the youth had said, enclosing an incredible warmth.

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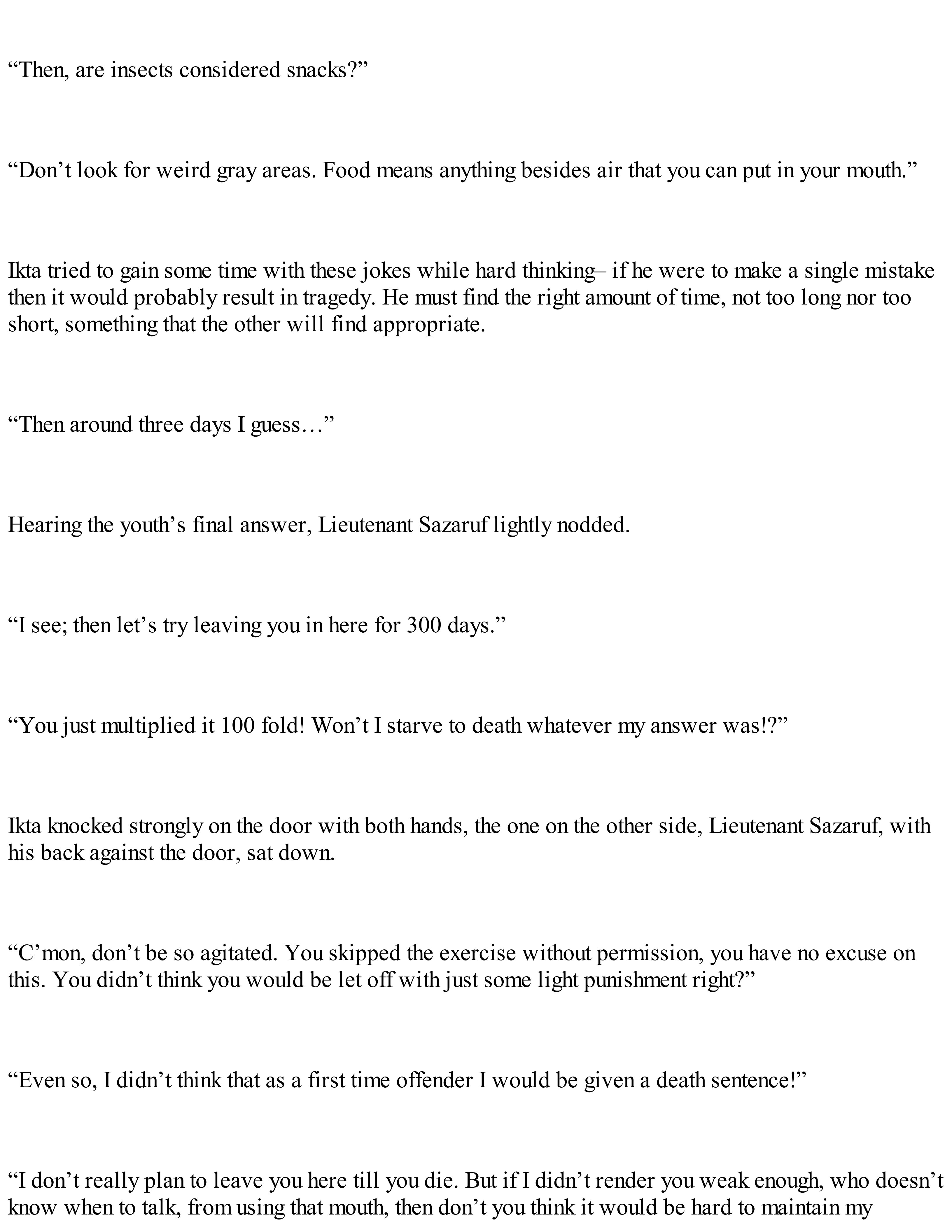
With the rough escort of the supervisor, Ikta went straight to the punishment cell located in the inner side of the base. It was no larger than three square meters, completely devoid of any light, even the monitoring window was barred, it was no different from a prison.

“Warrant Officer Sorlok. How many days have you lasted with no food or water?”

Hearing the terrifying question Lieutenant asked from over the monitoring window, Ikta seriously though about it.

“… are snacks considered food?”

“Of course, also your clever tricks won't work in here.”


“Then, are insects considered snacks?”

“Don’t look for weird gray areas. Food means anything besides air that you can put in your mouth.”

Ikta tried to gain some time with these jokes while hard thinking– if he were to make a single mistake then it would probably result in tragedy. He must find the right amount of time, not too long nor too short, something that the other will find appropriate.

“Then around three days I guess…”

Hearing the youth’s final answer, Lieutenant Sazaruf lightly nodded.

“I see; then let’s try leaving you in here for 300 days.”

“You just multiplied it 100 fold! Won’t I starve to death whatever my answer was!?”

Ikta knocked strongly on the door with both hands, the one on the other side, Lieutenant Sazaruf, with his back against the door, sat down.

“C’mon, don’t be so agitated. You skipped the exercise without permission, you have no excuse on this. You didn’t think you would be let off with just some light punishment right?”

“Even so, I didn’t think that as a first time offender I would be given a death sentence!”

“I don’t really plan to leave you here till you die. But if I didn’t render you weak enough, who doesn’t know when to talk, from using that mouth, then don’t you think it would be hard to maintain my

position as superior?”

Sigh– Lieutenant Sazaruf after heavily sighing, continued:

“…To tell you the truth, I really can’t understand. What kind of ideas brought you to your current situation?”

“Even if you ask me the ideas I had, I can’t really answer that… to be clearer, 100% of them were compelling circumstances”

“If that is so, then the rumors wouldn’t be so action packed and exciting right? Even if I considered you getting knighted was a complete lucky stroke, then what about the incident regarding the attempted kidnapping of the third princess? No matter how I look at it, the positive outcome could only be attributed to your swift actions.”

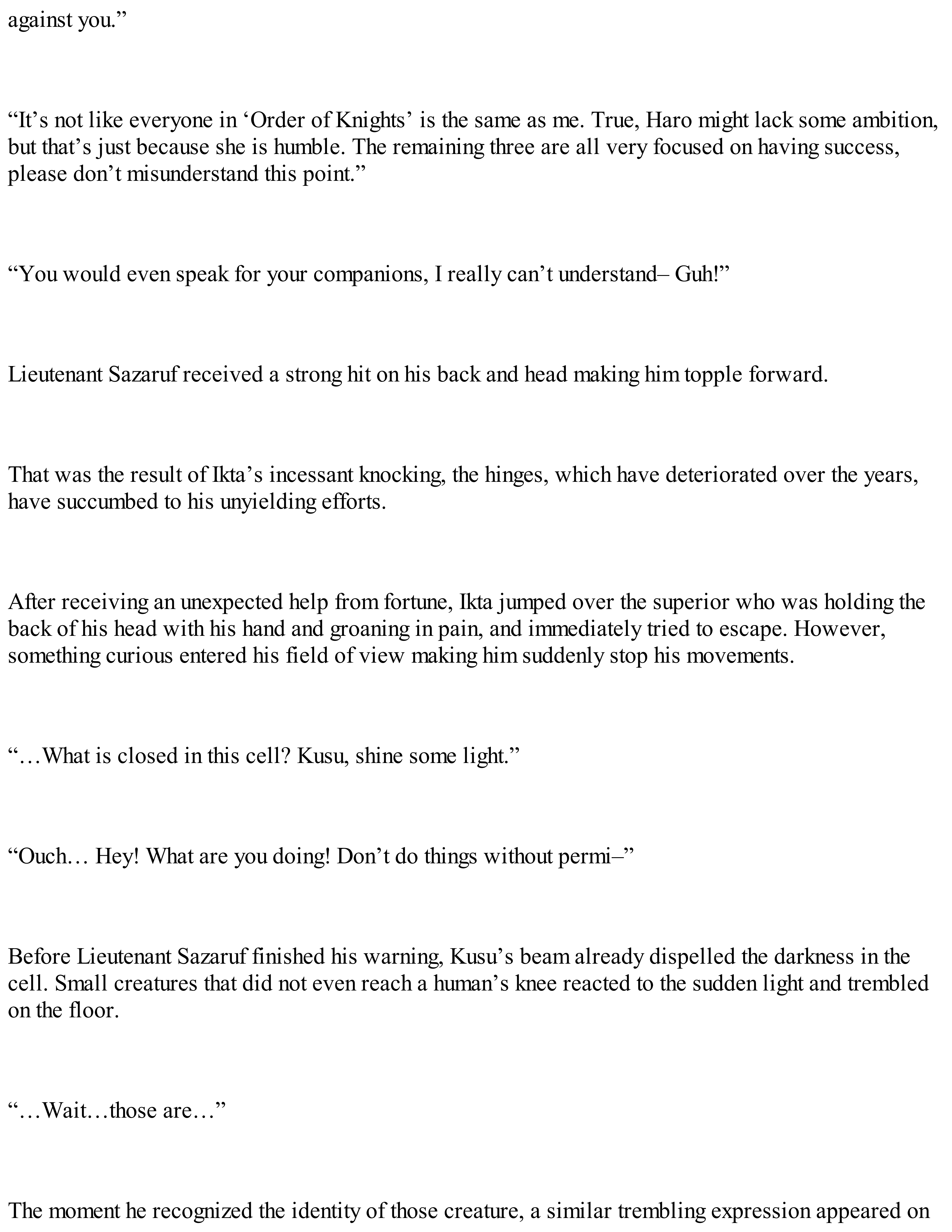
“About that, it would be annoying if I denied so let’s leave it alone for now… but Lieutenant Sazaruf, do you perhaps have some prejudice against me?”

With Ikta’s sharp counterattack, the Lieutenant nodded while shrugging his shoulders.

“…. It may be so. Even if you look like a freak, that’s still just your outer appearance. I originally thought you were the standard type to strictly adhere to successfulness. That would be the oblivious conclusion right? After all, those kind of guys always flock to high ranked officers.”

“I think this would be a good example of misunderstanding the nature of an opponent because of prejudice.”

“Oh, I admit it. It looks like you don’t have the slightest interest in having success. Because if it were so the you wouldn’t have skipped an easy exercise which would create materials that could be held



against you."

"It's not like everyone in 'Order of Knights' is the same as me. True, Haro might lack some ambition, but that's just because she is humble. The remaining three are all very focused on having success, please don't misunderstand this point."

"You would even speak for your companions, I really can't understand– Guh!"

Lieutenant Sazaruf received a strong hit on his back and head making him topple forward.

That was the result of Ikta's incessant knocking, the hinges, which have deteriorated over the years, have succumbed to his unyielding efforts.

After receiving an unexpected help from fortune, Ikta jumped over the superior who was holding the back of his head with his hand and groaning in pain, and immediately tried to escape. However, something curious entered his field of view making him suddenly stop his movements.

"…What is closed in this cell? Kusu, shine some light."

"Ouch… Hey! What are you doing! Don't do things without permi–"

Before Lieutenant Sazaruf finished his warning, Kusu's beam already dispelled the darkness in the cell. Small creatures that did not even reach a human's knee reacted to the sudden light and trembled on the floor.

"…Wait…those are…"

The moment he recognized the identity of those creature, a similar trembling expression appeared on

Ikta’s face.

“…Spirits! What is this? Why are spirits being held in such place–”

“Ahhh~ you shined on them… Warrant Officer Sorlok, tell your partner to stop the light, this is an order.”

Hearing the commanding tone Lieutenant Sazaruf issued his order, Ikta could only turn off the light for the time being. Because of that, one couldn’t see the shapes of the spirits anymore, only their highly reflective irises shone in the darkness like those of a cat’s.

“…Lieutenant, can you explain what is this?”

Lieutenant Sazaruf revealed an expression as if saying ‘the troublesome guy has seen it huh’ and scratched his head.

“In short, it’s as you can see.”

“No, no, although it is weird that I’m the one saying this, isn’t that an abnormal scenery? ‘The spirit and its contractor shalt always be together, no one shalt violate the will of the two forcing them to separate’–this is at the base of the teachings of the Alderamin church, and shouldn’t this principle be upheld even in battle against enemies?”

“The war has already ended, furthermore this is the northern region far from the frontlines, these can’t be spirits that are awaiting to be returned, even if that were so such treatment is not reasonable. Because they don’t receive enough light, they are not able to move.”

The four spirit uses light as energy. Though there are exceptions, light is indeed their main source of vitality, this kind of resource could be ‘stored beforehand’ making it a common sight, in clear days,

spirits growing thin, membrane like, wings and bathe in the sun.

“These spirits have been locked in such dark environment for far too long making them unable to move. To a human standpoint that would be imprisonment, starvation and abuse of the spirits… What is the objective behind this, and who gave the orders for it to be conducted?”

Ikta put away his evil intents and with his spirit partner stared at the superior.

Lieutenant Sazaruf, unable to stand their impeaching looks, shook his head as if trying to avoid it.

“Don’t talk like I’m the culprit… I will tell you since you saw that. The one who ordered this is no one else than the supreme commander of the northern region Lieutenant General Safida.”

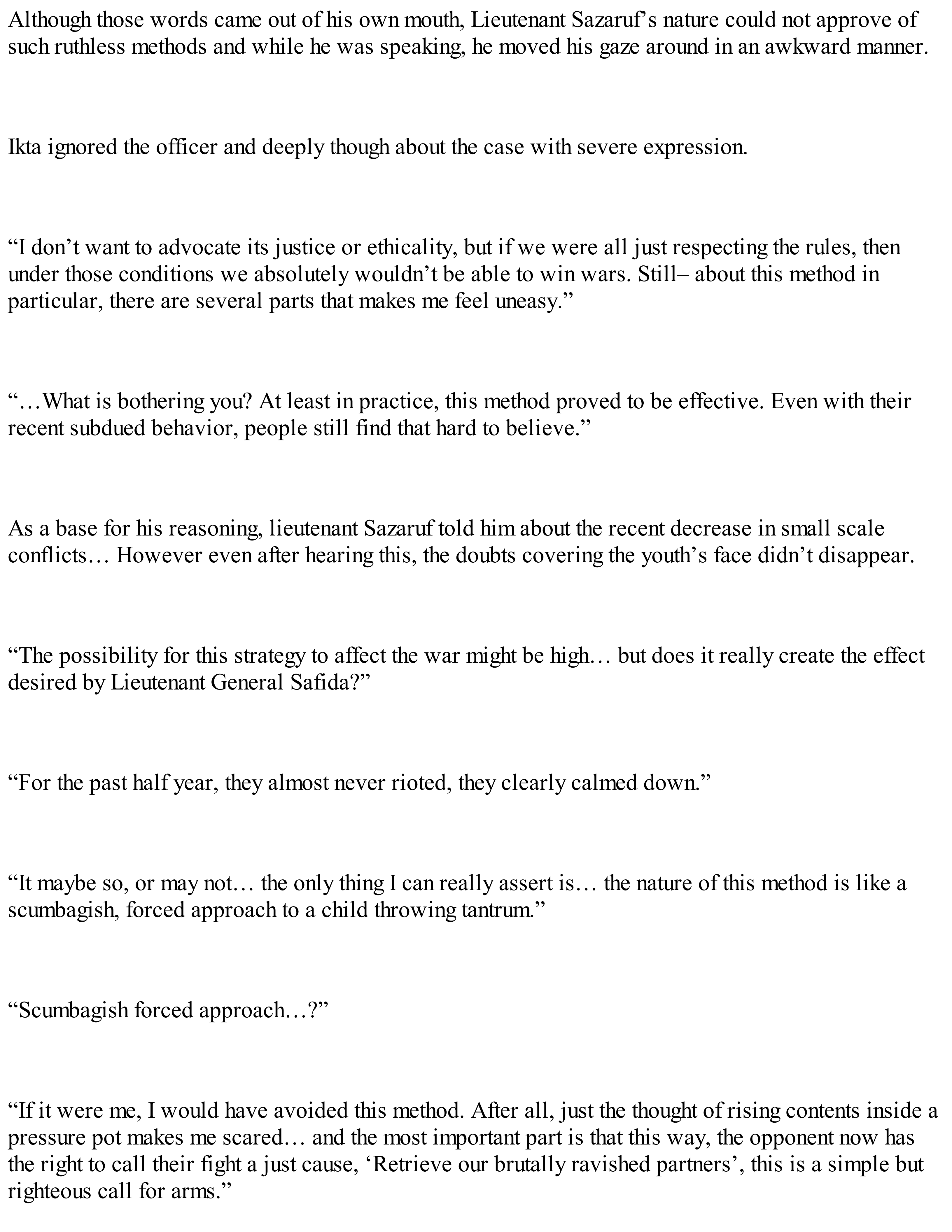
When that name appeared, Ikta immediately figured out the situation.

“…I see; they were taken away from the Shinaak tribe who are in tension with the military right?”

“As expected of you, that’s correct, you understand very quickly.”

“Because when I shined on them, all I saw were wind and fire spirits. Among the four spirits, these two kinds can be directly used as weapons…Air guns and fire. Without these two, in the modern warfare, their battle prowess would significantly decrease. So I can understand from a strategic point of view the merit of removing them.”

“You are pretty smart… well, that’s the nutshell of the situation. Facing the long-lasting and never ending conflicts with the Shinaak Tribe, this is our last resort in restraining them. By confiscating both spirits and weapons from those troublesome guys we prevent after fires.”



Although those words came out of his own mouth, Lieutenant Sazaruf's nature could not approve of such ruthless methods and while he was speaking, he moved his gaze around in an awkward manner.

Ikta ignored the officer and deeply though about the case with severe expression.

"I don't want to advocate its justice or ethicality, but if we were all just respecting the rules, then under those conditions we absolutely wouldn't be able to win wars. Still– about this method in particular, there are several parts that makes me feel uneasy."

"…What is bothering you? At least in practice, this method proved to be effective. Even with their recent subdued behavior, people still find that hard to believe."

As a base for his reasoning, lieutenant Sazaruf told him about the recent decrease in small scale conflicts… However even after hearing this, the doubts covering the youth's face didn't disappear.

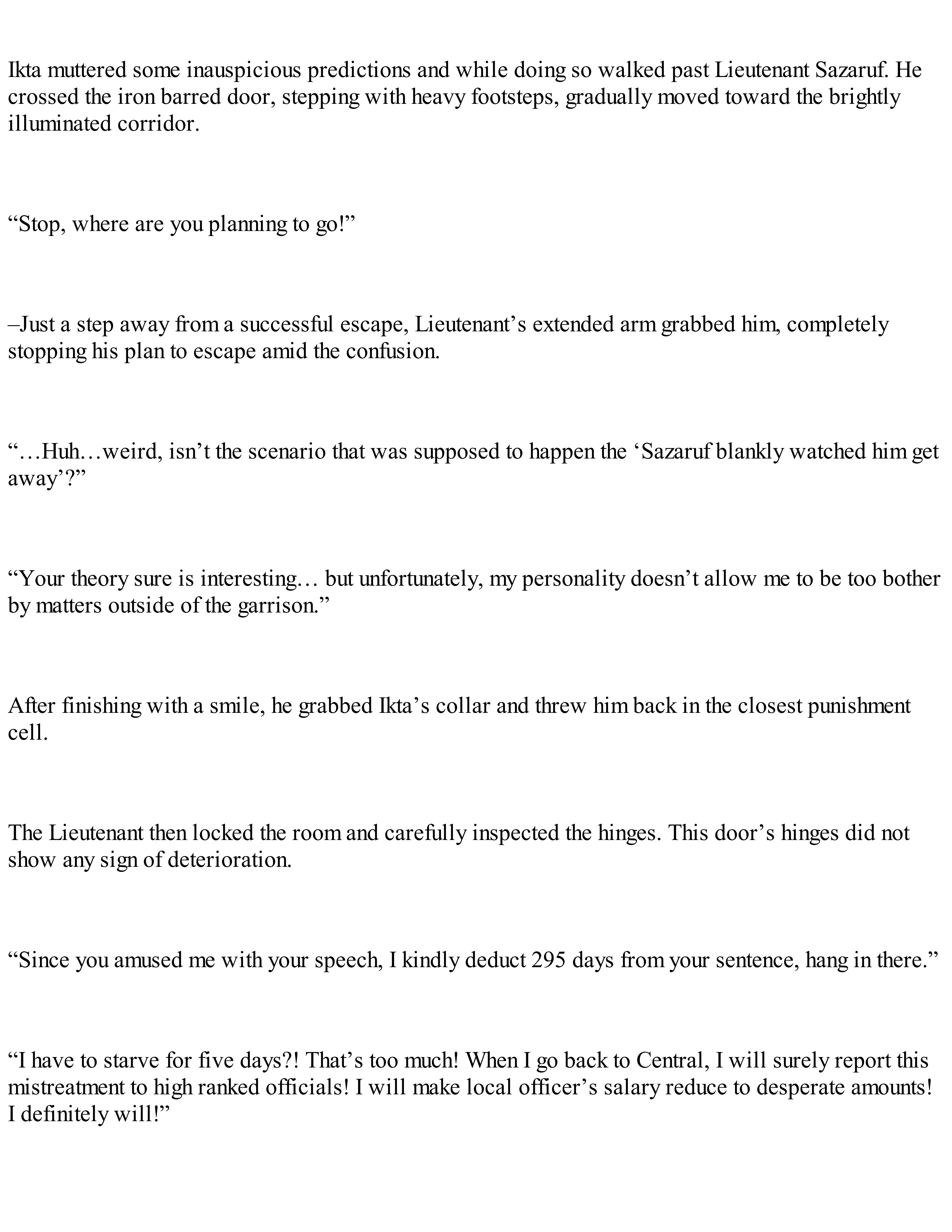
"The possibility for this strategy to affect the war might be high… but does it really create the effect desired by Lieutenant General Safida?"

"For the past half year, they almost never rioted, they clearly calmed down."

"It maybe so, or may not… the only thing I can really assert is… the nature of this method is like a scumbagish, forced approach to a child throwing tantrum."

"Scumbagish forced approach…?"

"If it were me, I would have avoided this method. After all, just the thought of rising contents inside a pressure pot makes me scared… and the most important part is that this way, the opponent now has the right to call their fight a just cause, 'Retrieve our brutally ravished partners', this is a simple but righteous call for arms."



Ikta muttered some inauspicious predictions and while doing so walked past Lieutenant Sazaruf. He crossed the iron barred door, stepping with heavy footsteps, gradually moved toward the brightly illuminated corridor.

“Stop, where are you planning to go!”

–Just a step away from a successful escape, Lieutenant’s extended arm grabbed him, completely stopping his plan to escape amid the confusion.

“…Huh…weird, isn’t the scenario that was supposed to happen the ‘Sazaruf blankly watched him get away’?”

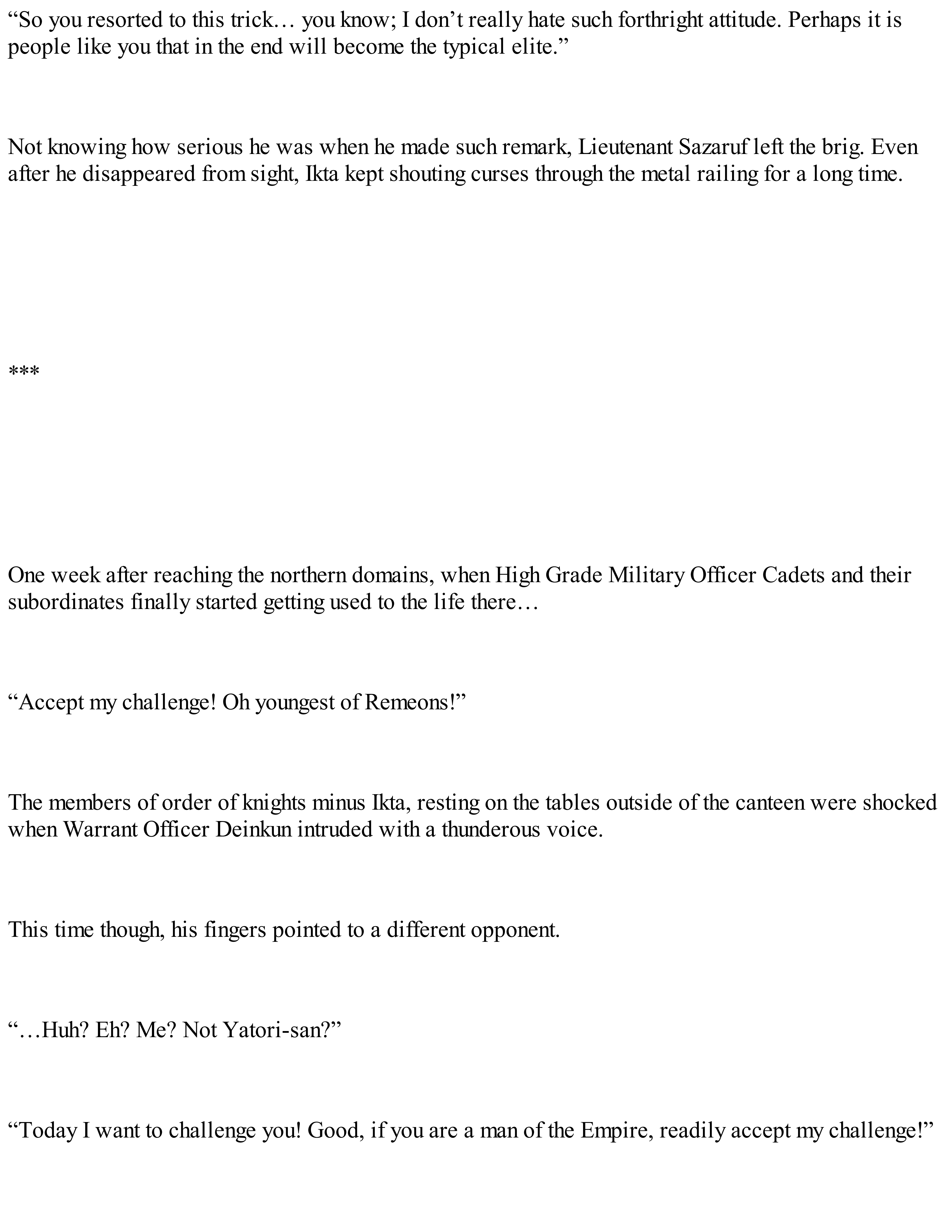
“Your theory sure is interesting… but unfortunately, my personality doesn’t allow me to be too bother by matters outside of the garrison.”

After finishing with a smile, he grabbed Ikta’s collar and threw him back in the closest punishment cell.

The Lieutenant then locked the room and carefully inspected the hinges. This door’s hinges did not show any sign of deterioration.

“Since you amused me with your speech, I kindly deduct 295 days from your sentence, hang in there.”

“I have to starve for five days?! That’s too much! When I go back to Central, I will surely report this mistreatment to high ranked officials! I will make local officer’s salary reduce to desperate amounts! I definitely will!”


“So you resorted to this trick… you know; I don’t really hate such forthright attitude. Perhaps it is people like you that in the end will become the typical elite.”

Not knowing how serious he was when he made such remark, Lieutenant Sazaruf left the brig. Even after he disappeared from sight, Ikta kept shouting curses through the metal railing for a long time.

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One week after reaching the northern domains, when High Grade Military Officer Cadets and their subordinates finally started getting used to the life there…

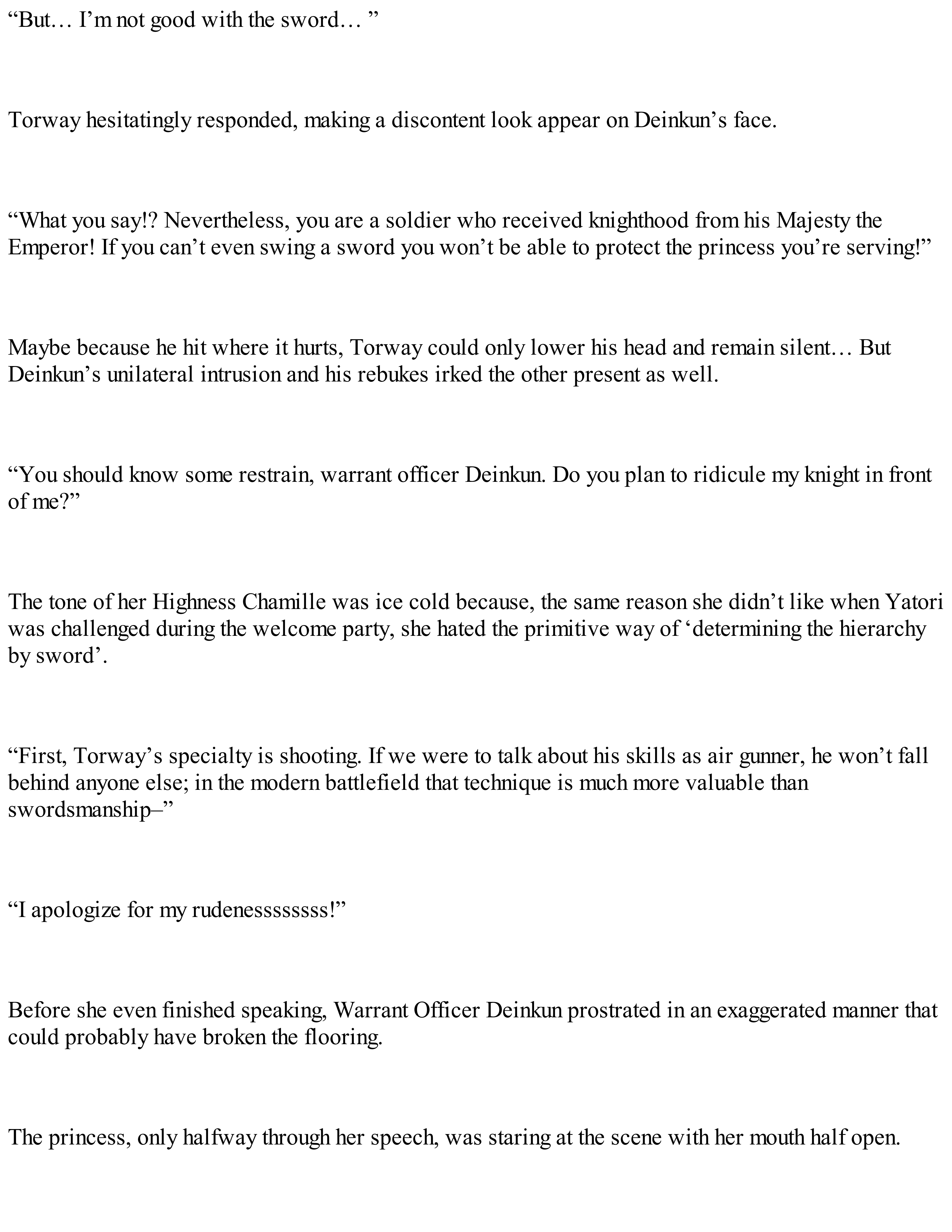
“Accept my challenge! Oh youngest of Remeons!”

The members of order of knights minus Ikta, resting on the tables outside of the canteen were shocked when Warrant Officer Deinkun intruded with a thunderous voice.

This time though, his fingers pointed to a different opponent.

“…Huh? Eh? Me? Not Yatori-san?”

“Today I want to challenge you! Good, if you are a man of the Empire, readily accept my challenge!”



“But… I’m not good with the sword… ”

Torway hesitatingly responded, making a discontent look appear on Deinkun’s face.

“What you say!? Nevertheless, you are a soldier who received knighthood from his Majesty the Emperor! If you can’t even swing a sword you won’t be able to protect the princess you’re serving!”

Maybe because he hit where it hurts, Torway could only lower his head and remain silent… But Deinkun’s unilateral intrusion and his rebukes irked the other present as well.

“You should know some restrain, warrant officer Deinkun. Do you plan to ridicule my knight in front of me?”

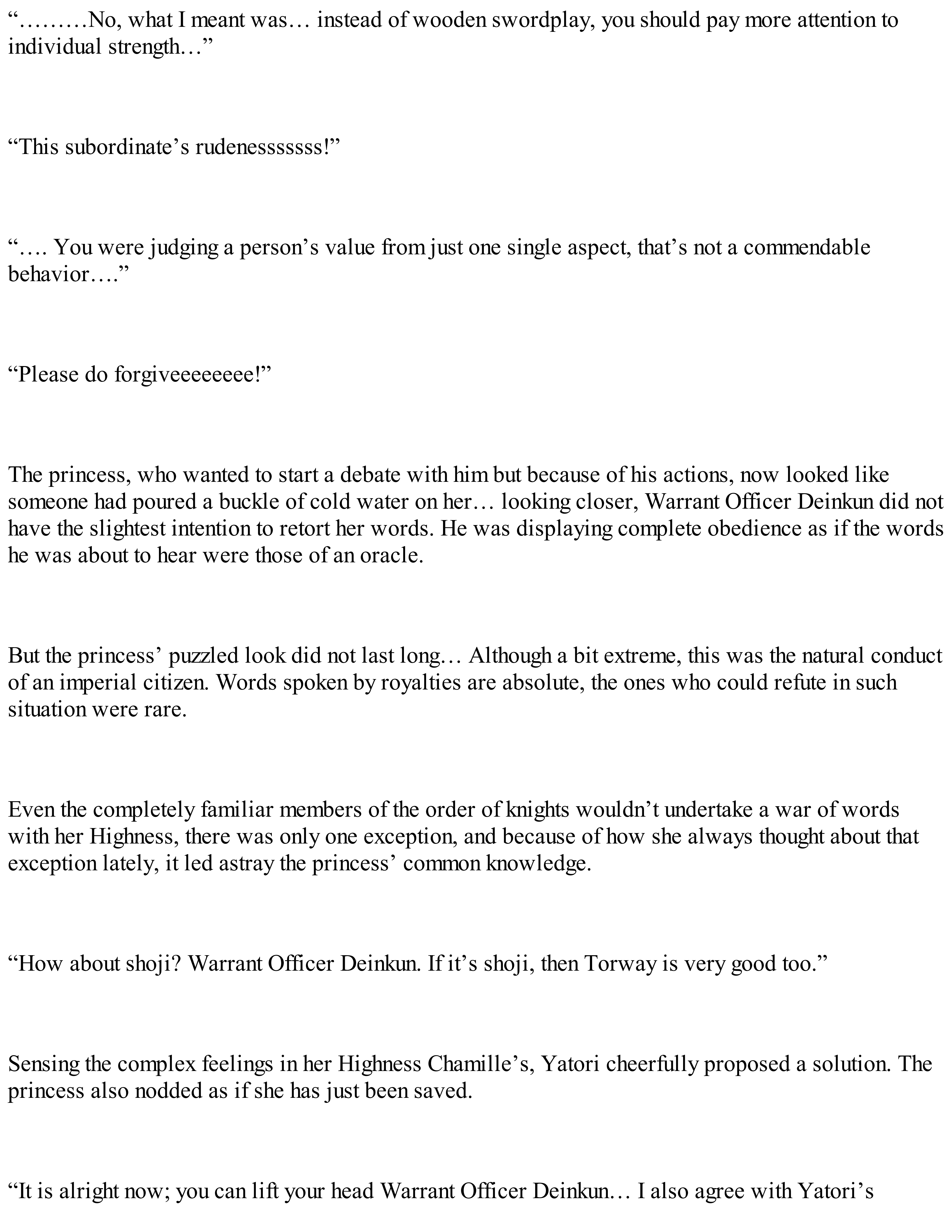
The tone of her Highness Chamille was ice cold because, the same reason she didn’t like when Yatori was challenged during the welcome party, she hated the primitive way of ‘determining the hierarchy by sword’.

“First, Torway’s specialty is shooting. If we were to talk about his skills as air gunner, he won’t fall behind anyone else; in the modern battlefield that technique is much more valuable than swordsmanship–”

“I apologize for my rudenesssssssss!”

Before she even finished speaking, Warrant Officer Deinkun prostrated in an exaggerated manner that could probably have broken the flooring.

The princess, only halfway through her speech, was staring at the scene with her mouth half open.



“………No, what I meant was… instead of wooden swordplay, you should pay more attention to individual strength…”

“This subordinate’s rudenesssssss!”

“…. You were judging a person’s value from just one single aspect, that’s not a commendable behavior….”

“Please do forgiveeeeeeee!”

The princess, who wanted to start a debate with him but because of his actions, now looked like someone had poured a buckle of cold water on her… looking closer, Warrant Officer Deinkun did not have the slightest intention to retort her words. He was displaying complete obedience as if the words he was about to hear were those of an oracle.

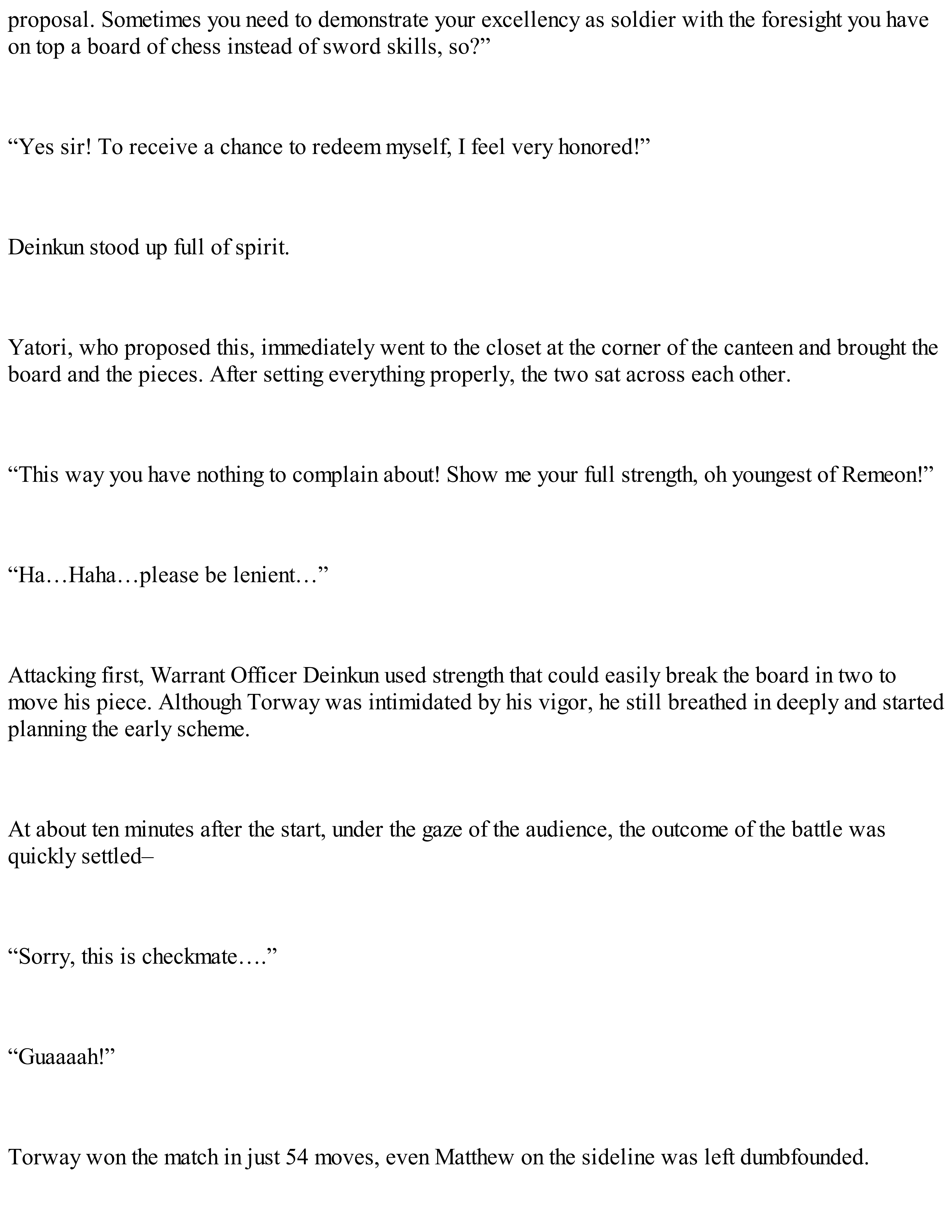
But the princess’ puzzled look did not last long… Although a bit extreme, this was the natural conduct of an imperial citizen. Words spoken by royalties are absolute, the ones who could refute in such situation were rare.

Even the completely familiar members of the order of knights wouldn’t undertake a war of words with her Highness, there was only one exception, and because of how she always thought about that exception lately, it led astray the princess’ common knowledge.

“How about shoji? Warrant Officer Deinkun. If it’s shoji, then Torway is very good too.”

Sensing the complex feelings in her Highness Chamille’s, Yatori cheerfully proposed a solution. The princess also nodded as if she has just been saved.

“It is alright now; you can lift your head Warrant Officer Deinkun… I also agree with Yatori’s


proposal. Sometimes you need to demonstrate your excellency as soldier with the foresight you have on top a board of chess instead of sword skills, so?”

“Yes sir! To receive a chance to redeem myself, I feel very honored!”

Deinkun stood up full of spirit.

Yatori, who proposed this, immediately went to the closet at the corner of the canteen and brought the board and the pieces. After setting everything properly, the two sat across each other.

“This way you have nothing to complain about! Show me your full strength, oh youngest of Remeon!”

“Ha…Haha…please be lenient…”

Attacking first, Warrant Officer Deinkun used strength that could easily break the board in two to move his piece. Although Torway was intimidated by his vigor, he still breathed in deeply and started planning the early scheme.

At about ten minutes after the start, under the gaze of the audience, the outcome of the battle was quickly settled–

“Sorry, this is checkmate….”

“Guaaaah!”

Torway won the match in just 54 moves, even Matthew on the sideline was left dumbfounded.



"…Weak, it is way too weak. Why did he attack when he was at disadvantage?"

"D-Defense is not for me! As the general, I must compensate the lack of troops with morale!"

Tl note: general here is the most important piece in shogi (like the king in chess)

"Since this is shogi, no matter how hard you try the pieces' performance won't change~"

The logical words Matthew and Haro said mercilessly stabbed into Deinkun's back. Unable to bear the humiliation, he stood up with shaking shoulders, with almost teary eyes, stared at Torway.

"You are a dreadful man, Torway Remeon… but, don't think this is over!"

"Hah, sure. If it is shoji, I can fight anytime…"

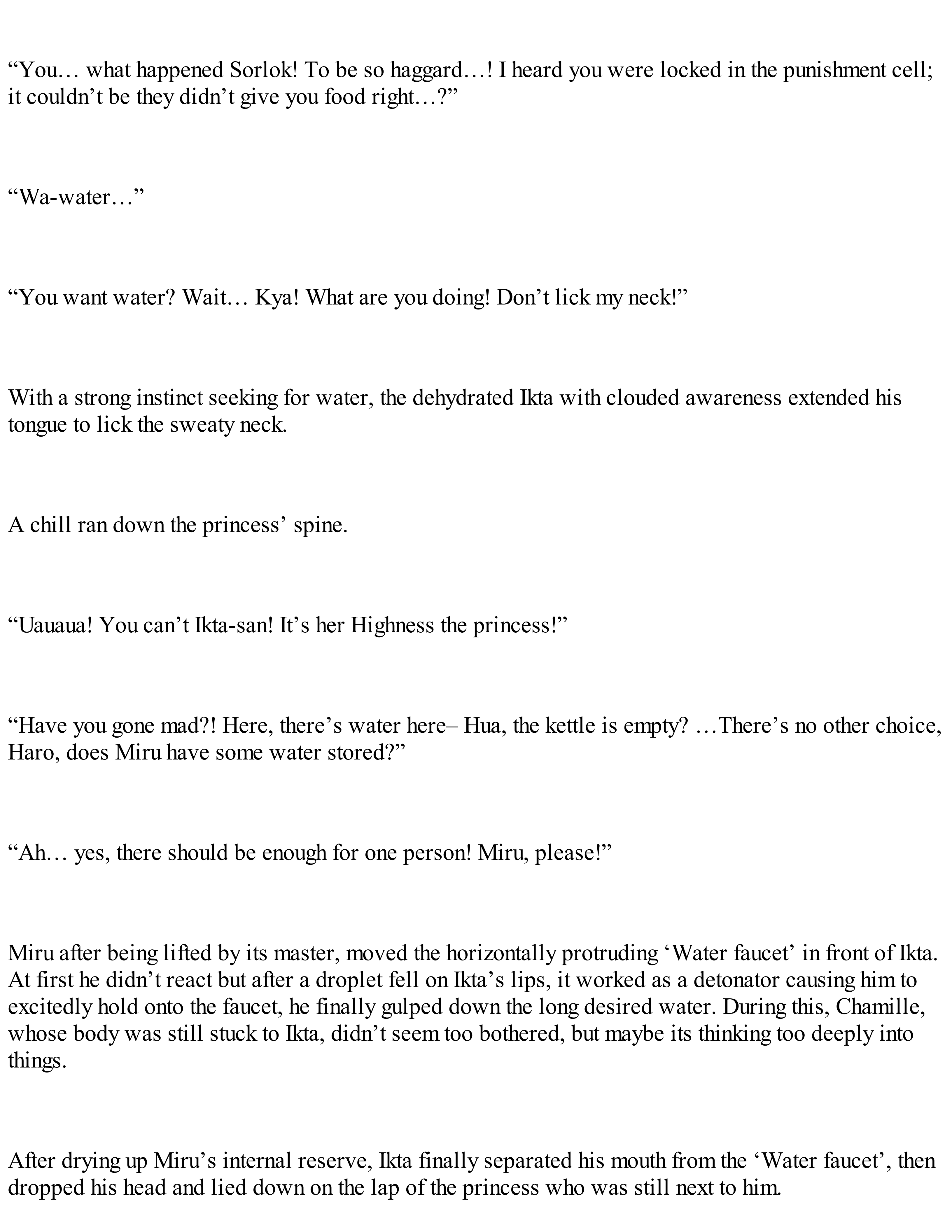
After hearing the promise of a rematch, Warrant Officer Deinkun turned his back and left the canteen with a dignified demeanor unlike that of a someone who lost.

"Don't block my way! Get out!"

"Woah…."

His big body with its momentum kicked a nearby object away as if it were trash, looking closely, with looks similar to that of a newborn fawn, the one trying to get up with shaky knees was in truth Ikta.

He gasped out some sounds from his dried up lips, then collapsed directly in front of the canteen. Panicking, the princess stood up and ran to where Ikta was.


"You… what happened Sorlok! To be so haggard…! I heard you were locked in the punishment cell; it couldn't be they didn't give you food right…?"

"Wa-water…"

"You want water? Wait… Kya! What are you doing! Don't lick my neck!"

With a strong instinct seeking for water, the dehydrated Ikta with clouded awareness extended his tongue to lick the sweaty neck.

A chill ran down the princess' spine.

"Uauaua! You can't Ikta-san! It's her Highness the princess!"

"Have you gone mad?! Here, there's water here– Hua, the kettle is empty? …There's no other choice, Haro, does Miru have some water stored?"

"Ah… yes, there should be enough for one person! Miru, please!"

Miru after being lifted by its master, moved the horizontally protruding 'Water faucet' in front of Ikta. At first he didn't react but after a droplet fell on Ikta's lips, it worked as a detonator causing him to excitedly hold onto the faucet, he finally gulped down the long desired water. During this, Chamille, whose body was still stuck to Ikta, didn't seem too bothered, but maybe its thinking too deeply into things.

After drying up Miru's internal reserve, Ikta finally separated his mouth from the 'Water faucet', then dropped his head and lied down on the lap of the princess who was still next to him.



“……Aahhhh… I’m still alive.”

“Oh, did your consciousness come back? Seriously, Ikta-san when was the last time you drank?”

“Six whole days ago… that damned Lieutenant Sazaruf, even saying something like ‘Sorry, sorry, I forgot the date’…”

“But you put yourself in that predicament right? If you are okay now, move away from the princess!”

After Yatori’s words, Ikta finally realized on whose lap his head had been resting till now. He and the princess, who was still red on face because of what just happened, kept silently staring at each other.

“…….Sorlok, don’t you have anything to say to me?”

“…Yes. If I wanted to enjoy a lap pillow, I should have found a more abundant one–Guhee!”

Her Highness Chamille’s downward swing already hit his nose before Ikta could finish his sentence. Afterward the princess stared with teary eyes at Ikta who rolled down her lap because of the pain.

“You should have just starved to death!”

“Ugh… Please don’t shout, if you were to leave me alone I will starve to death sooner or later… ahh~ I’m so hungry. I don’t even have the energy to grab insects…”

Ikta meekly laid down on the floor, at that moment a small bag landed on his concave, starved

stomach. Yatori gently threw that bag without a word.

“Resurrect faster, if you were to kick the bucket in such place you would only bring troubles to the base.”

Hearing that, Ikta happily opened the bag to see inside some toasted bread, a piece of papaya and also some mutton. All of them were meals provided to the personnel in these days.

“As expected of Yatori, such wonderful and considerate gesture!”

Right after finishing speaking, Ikta immediately stuffed the food in his mouth. Haro, while looking at the scene, was thinking ‘That…’ and silently whispered to Yatori.

“…Since yesterday I thought I saw you bring stuff back to the dorm in small bags… was that for Ikta-san? Did you predict that he would be released today with an empty stomach…?”

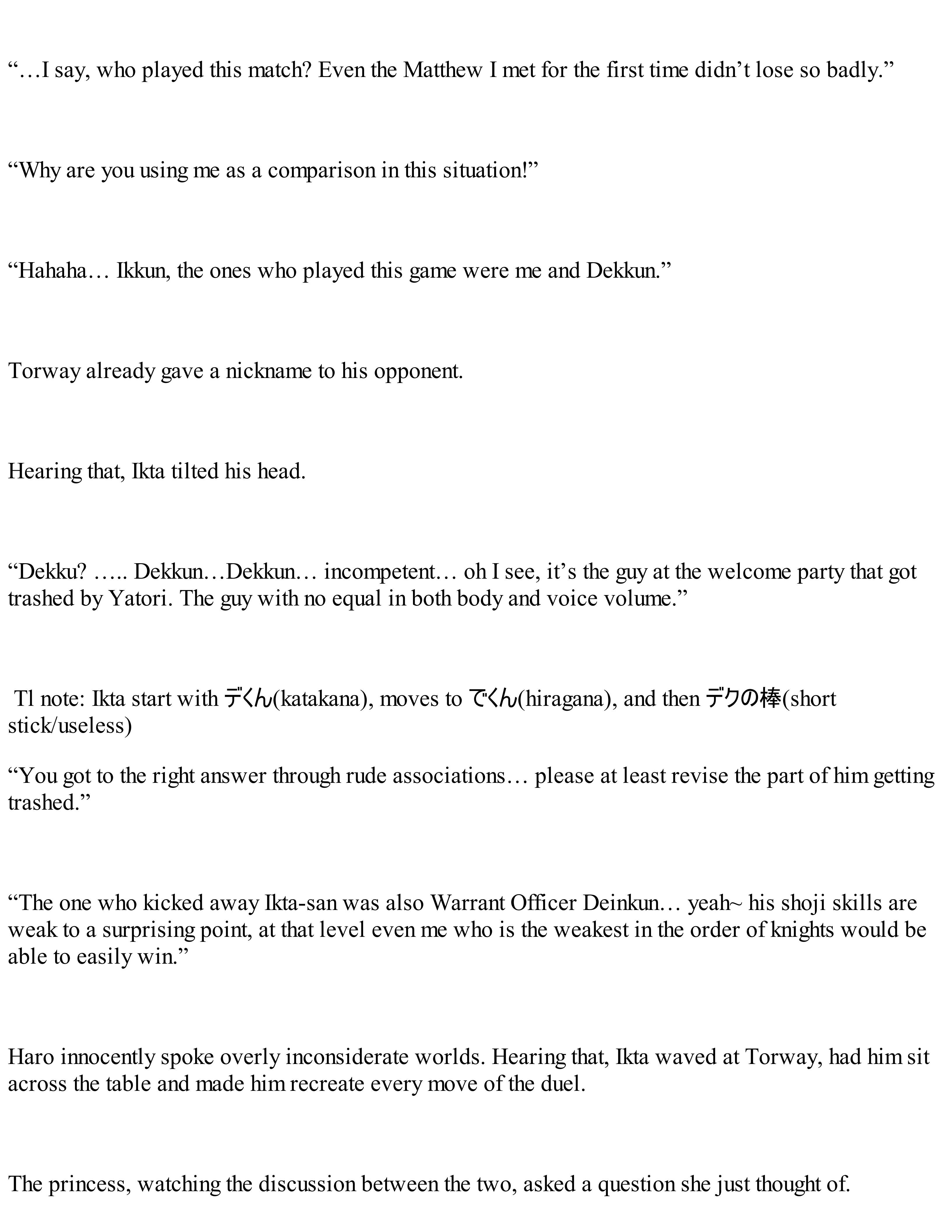
“I just wanted to eat it later myself, don’t think too highly of me, Haro.”

While saying so, Yatori gently pinched Haro’s nose with her fingers. Overhearing this conversation, Torway gazed at Yatori with a difficult expression, but as expected the person herself did not notice.

In the meanwhile, Ikta emptied the sack’s content without even leaving crumbs, then, as a totally different person from just a few minutes ago, he energetically stood up.

“Great~! Ikta has successfully revived! …huh? What’s this? Who played shoji?”

He saw the chessboard laid on the table and walked to it. After sitting on a nearby chair and analyzing the board for one second, he lifted his face with a confused look.



"…I say, who played this match? Even the Matthew I met for the first time didn't lose so badly."

"Why are you using me as a comparison in this situation!"

"Hahaha… Ikkun, the ones who played this game were me and Dekkun."

Torway already gave a nickname to his opponent.

Hearing that, Ikta tilted his head.

"Dekku? ….. Dekkun…Dekkun… incompetent… oh I see, it's the guy at the welcome party that got trashed by Yatori. The guy with no equal in both body and voice volume."

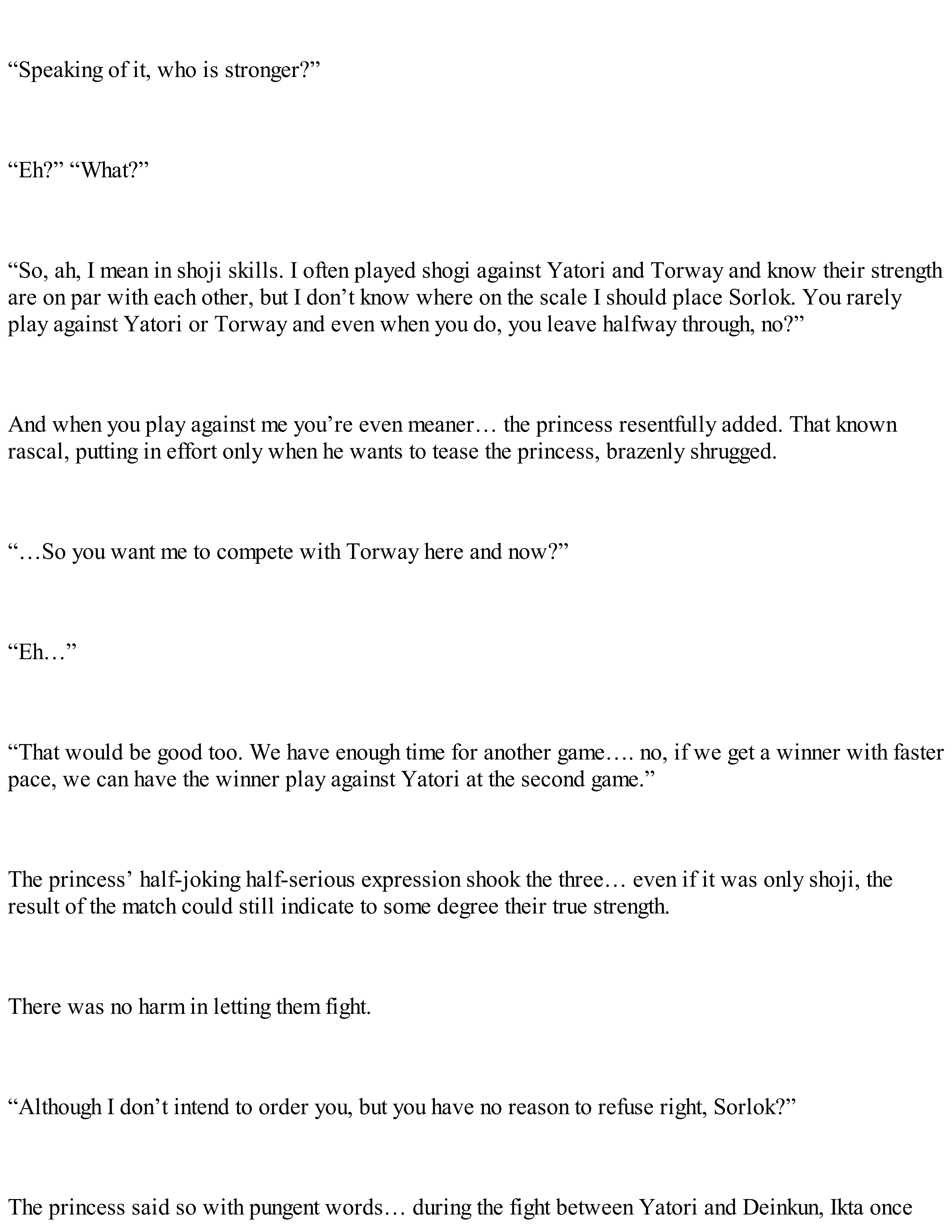
Tl note: Ikta start with デくん(katakana), moves to でくん(hiragana), and then デクの棒(short stick/useless)

"You got to the right answer through rude associations… please at least revise the part of him getting trashed."

"The one who kicked away Ikta-san was also Warrant Officer Deinkun… yeah~ his shoji skills are weak to a surprising point, at that level even me who is the weakest in the order of knights would be able to easily win."

Haro innocently spoke overly inconsiderate worlds. Hearing that, Ikta waved at Torway, had him sit across the table and made him recreate every move of the duel.

The princess, watching the discussion between the two, asked a question she just thought of.



“Speaking of it, who is stronger?”

“Eh?” “What?”

“So, ah, I mean in shoji skills. I often played shogi against Yatori and Torway and know their strength are on par with each other, but I don’t know where on the scale I should place Sorlok. You rarely play against Yatori or Torway and even when you do, you leave halfway through, no?”

And when you play against me you’re even meaner… the princess resentfully added. That known rascal, putting in effort only when he wants to tease the princess, brazenly shrugged.

“…So you want me to compete with Torway here and now?”

“Eh…”

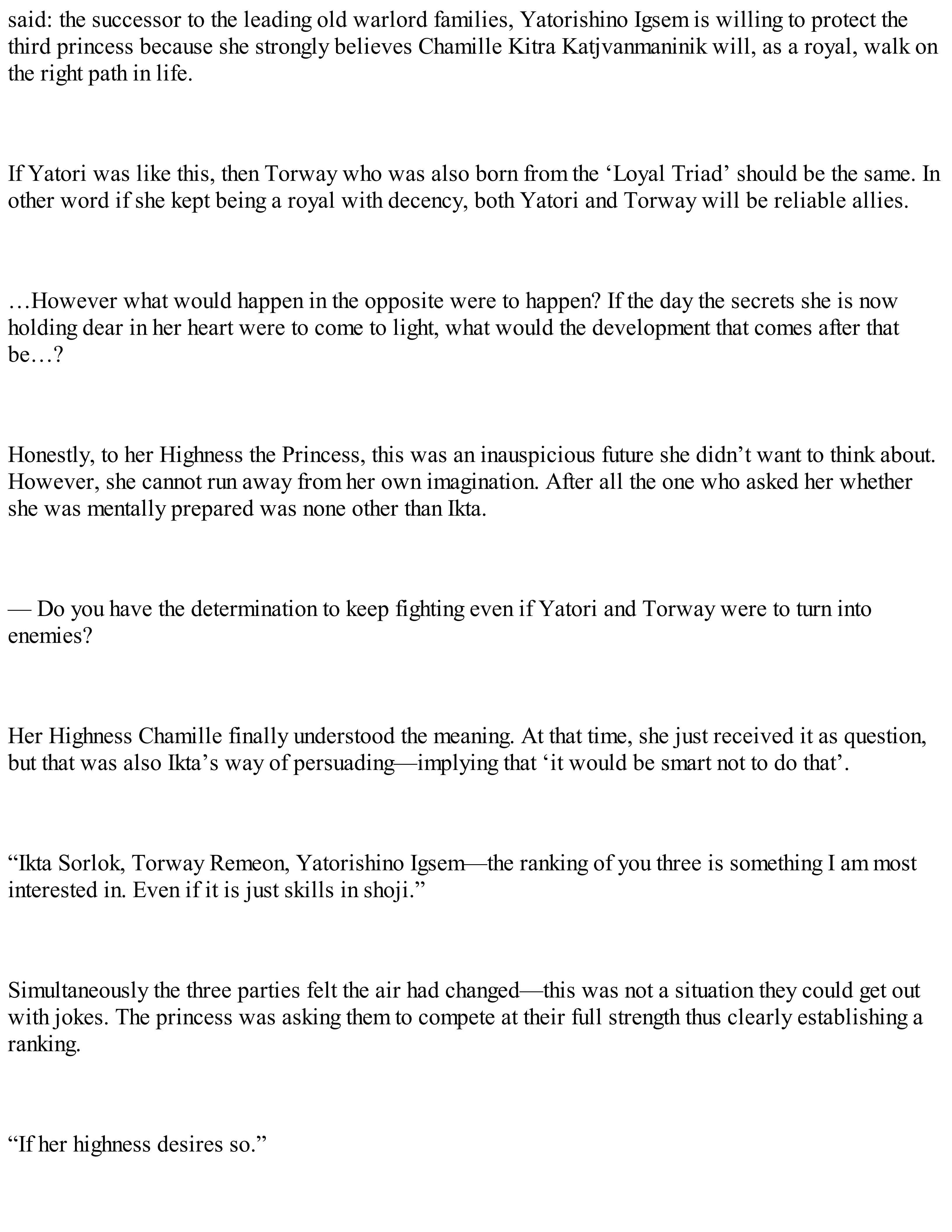
“That would be good too. We have enough time for another game…. no, if we get a winner with faster pace, we can have the winner play against Yatori at the second game.”

The princess’ half-joking half-serious expression shook the three… even if it was only shoji, the result of the match could still indicate to some degree their true strength.

There was no harm in letting them fight.

“Although I don’t intend to order you, but you have no reason to refuse right, Sorlok?”

The princess said so with pungent words… during the fight between Yatori and Deinkun, Ikta once



said: the successor to the leading old warlord families, Yatorishino Igsem is willing to protect the third princess because she strongly believes Chamille Kitra Katjvanmaninik will, as a royal, walk on the right path in life.

If Yatori was like this, then Torway who was also born from the ‘Loyal Triad’ should be the same. In other word if she kept being a royal with decency, both Yatori and Torway will be reliable allies.

…However what would happen in the opposite were to happen? If the day the secrets she is now holding dear in her heart were to come to light, what would the development that comes after that be…?

Honestly, to her Highness the Princess, this was an inauspicious future she didn’t want to think about. However, she cannot run away from her own imagination. After all the one who asked her whether she was mentally prepared was none other than Ikta.

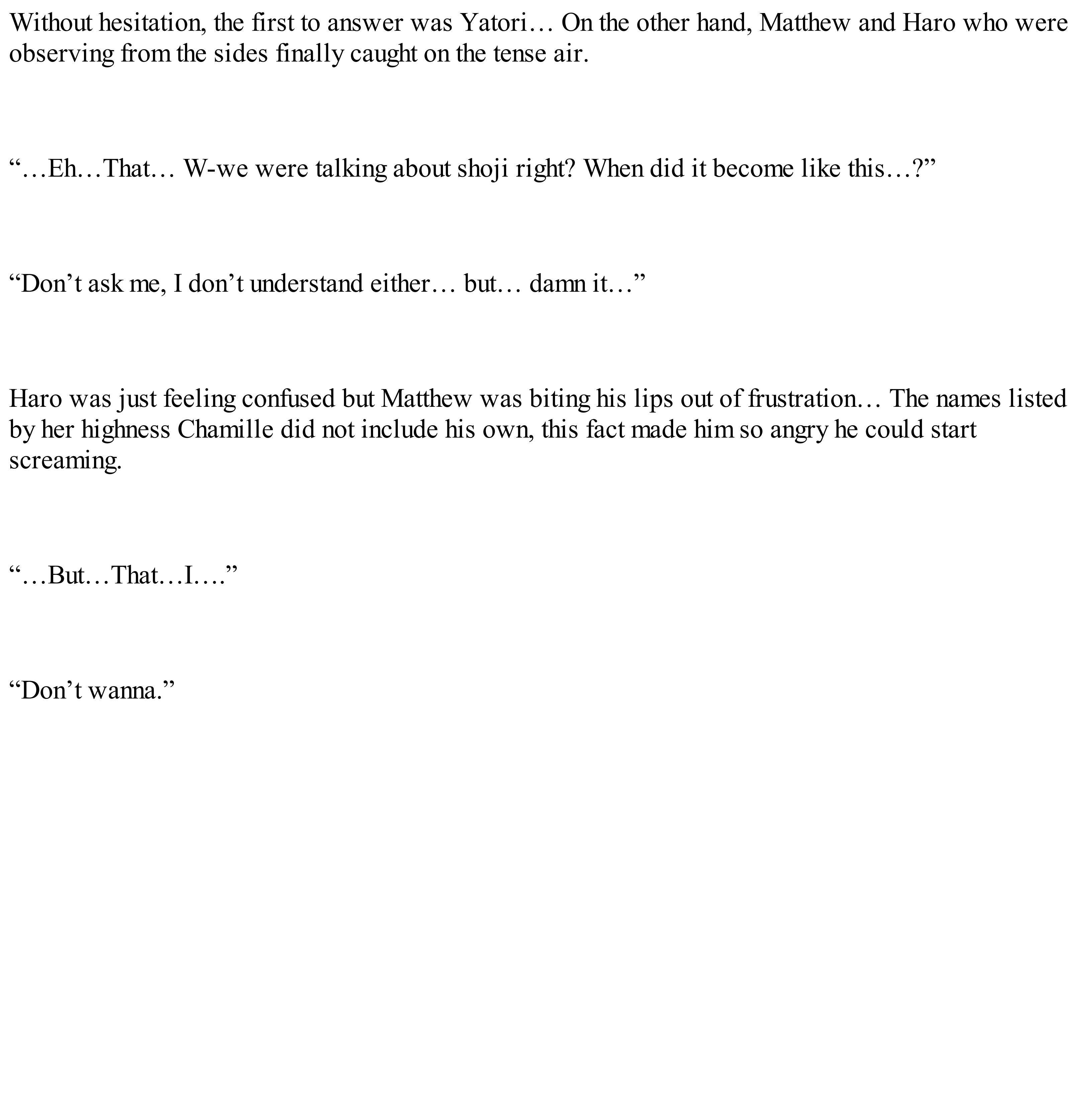
— Do you have the determination to keep fighting even if Yatori and Torway were to turn into enemies?

Her Highness Chamille finally understood the meaning. At that time, she just received it as question, but that was also Ikta’s way of persuading—implying that ‘it would be smart not to do that’.

“Ikta Sorlok, Torway Remeon, Yatorishino Igsem—the ranking of you three is something I am most interested in. Even if it is just skills in shoji.”

Simultaneously the three parties felt the air had changed—this was not a situation they could get out with jokes. The princess was asking them to compete at their full strength thus clearly establishing a ranking.

“If her highness desires so.”



Without hesitation, the first to answer was Yatori… On the other hand, Matthew and Haro who were observing from the sides finally caught on the tense air.

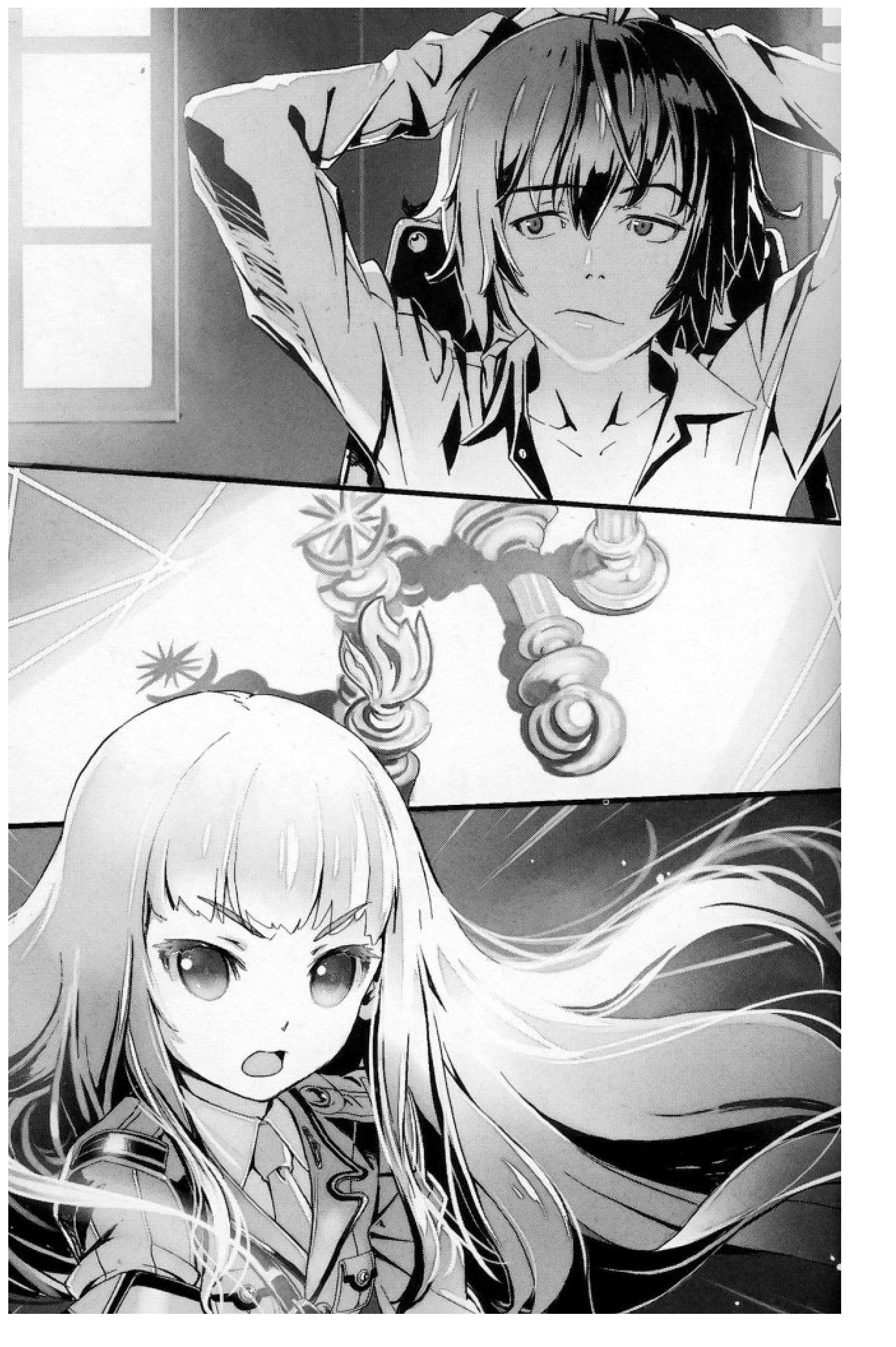
"…Eh…That… W-we were talking about shoji right? When did it become like this…?"

"Don't ask me, I don't understand either… but… damn it…"

Haro was just feeling confused but Matthew was biting his lips out of frustration… The names listed by her highness Chamille did not include his own, this fact made him so angry he could start screaming.

"…But…That…I…."

"Don't wanna."



When Torway was having a hard time finding words to say, Ikta already firmly declined. The princess stared at him with a disappointed face as he got up, like he didn't have anything to do there anymore.

"Say your reasons, Sorlok."

"If I must say it– it's because my value is the opposite of what the princess wants."

"I will think you are just afraid to accept a serious match."

"Think it as you want, since the beginning I didn't have any reputation to lose."

Ikta after nonchalantly replying decided to leave, her Highness the Princess with voice filled with anger shouted at his back:

"Now I understand–the one who is not mentally prepared is not me, it's you!"

"Correct, I will draw you a flower circle princess."

Before the retreating figure disappeared at the corner, her highness Chamille turned away and left with violent steps.

***

Kanna was forcing her legs forward step by step on the graveled road while thinking the goods in the cart today were especially heavy.

The whole platoon, including her, was dispatched to ferry the goods. To be more accurate, it was to transport the supplies, including food and other necessities, from the nearest city two hours away back to the base.

Since it would be a waste to bring an empty cart to the city, as there is stuff that are more easily processed there than at the base such as damaged pots, knives, shoes and so on, they had to carry these objects. This would obliviously be cause of substantial weights, but today, Kanna felt the weight bothered her body way more than usual.

“Ah… so tired… those cavalry units have it so good…”

To the four-man groups, responsible in pulling the carts, the figures of horse riding soldiers in front of them would involuntary generate feelings of envy.

The one leading in front of the cavalry ranks, with crimson hair on the winds and far looking eyes, was Warrant Officer Yatorishino.

But all responsibilities of this transporting goods mission falls on the one next to her, clutching to the horse, a slim man with poor complexion– aide to the supreme commander of the northern region, Major Yuskushiram Taekk.

“You must feel bored in this kind of mission, Warrant Officer Yatorishino. Cough…”



Major Taekk, who gets a coughing attack whenever he relaxes, said so.

“Not at all sir, because I understand the importance of escorting.”

Yatori honestly replied.

Although there were also horses behind the ranks, those were ‘workhorse’ pulling cargo carts or have goods strapped to their bodies, in contrast to the much lighter weighted ‘war horses’ Yatori and others were on.

“Instead, I was taken aback that a high ranked official such as yourself, Major, is personally participating these transport missions. Your careful supervision will be very helpful to me, as I lack the geographic knowledge pertaining this area.”

“Supervising you…? Well, there was also that reason. Yeah… Cough cough…”

In addition to ferrying goods, there were other matters that had to be personally handled by the Major– even if Yatori was aware of this, she understanding her position, did not inquire further. Having said that, she could still vaguely guess the reason.

“I would advise youngsters with bright future like you not to be obsessed with tactics and strategies, instead start learning right now military management… you should do so especially in peacetimes when you are unable to make use of war to climb.”

Major Taekk spontaneously said those words with a tired and self-deprecating tone…

So it really was that? Yatori could also understand. On borders such as this, you wouldn’t be able to maintain a military organization without painstaking efforts.

“To you who has already been in central and the eastern region, the northern base must look like a doghouse… leaving central aside, even comparing to the eastern garrison bordering Kioka, the north lacks severely on soldiers, because of that our fort would naturally have poorer appearances, of course there are also other reasons.”

When the major finished speaking, he moved his gaze sideway to have a look at Yatori. She also returned his gauging stare.

“It’s because of supply problems that you can’t establish a large-scale stronghold right? If you were to set a base capable of accommodating massive numbers of soldiers, then the cost of maintaining such huge operation would befall on nearby populace… the result will be feeding the soldiers but starve the people scenario. So the only option was to spread the combat power, knowing the risks associated with it, and build multiple small-scale bases.”

“…Yes, that’s it. An army, with the populace as the enemy does not have a future. This is not just some idealistic talks, it’s simply that when they no longer harvest grain, we too will starve. If you look at it in a straightforward way we must accommodate to the populace in order to survive, the so called army is just such a thing… cough, cough, how is it? Are you youngsters full of dreams disappointed by the reality?”

Major Taekk asked with an anguished expression, but contrary to his expectation Yatori shook her head with a hearty expression instead.

“Precisely because the army was originally this kind of thing, so the current condition is just a reflection of reality. War exist so we can obtain peace, thus we can’t allow the peace be dragged down by war.”

Looking like he was admiring at Yatori who had finished speaking, major Taekk emotionally nodded.

“If you were not bluffing when you said those words, then you would be a good soldier no matter the times you are in.”

“The times?”

“Cough, Cough. Yes, no matter how famous the general, whether you can experience war in your lifetime depends purely on luck. Many are the aging soldiers without any warfare experience. To tell the truth, even here we have them… but let’s not discuss whether that’s lucky or not.”

“No, I don’t think there’s a need for a discussion, it certainly is lucky. From another standpoint having few war veterans means results of the northern garrison in keeping peace for many years, becoming an inhibiting force.”

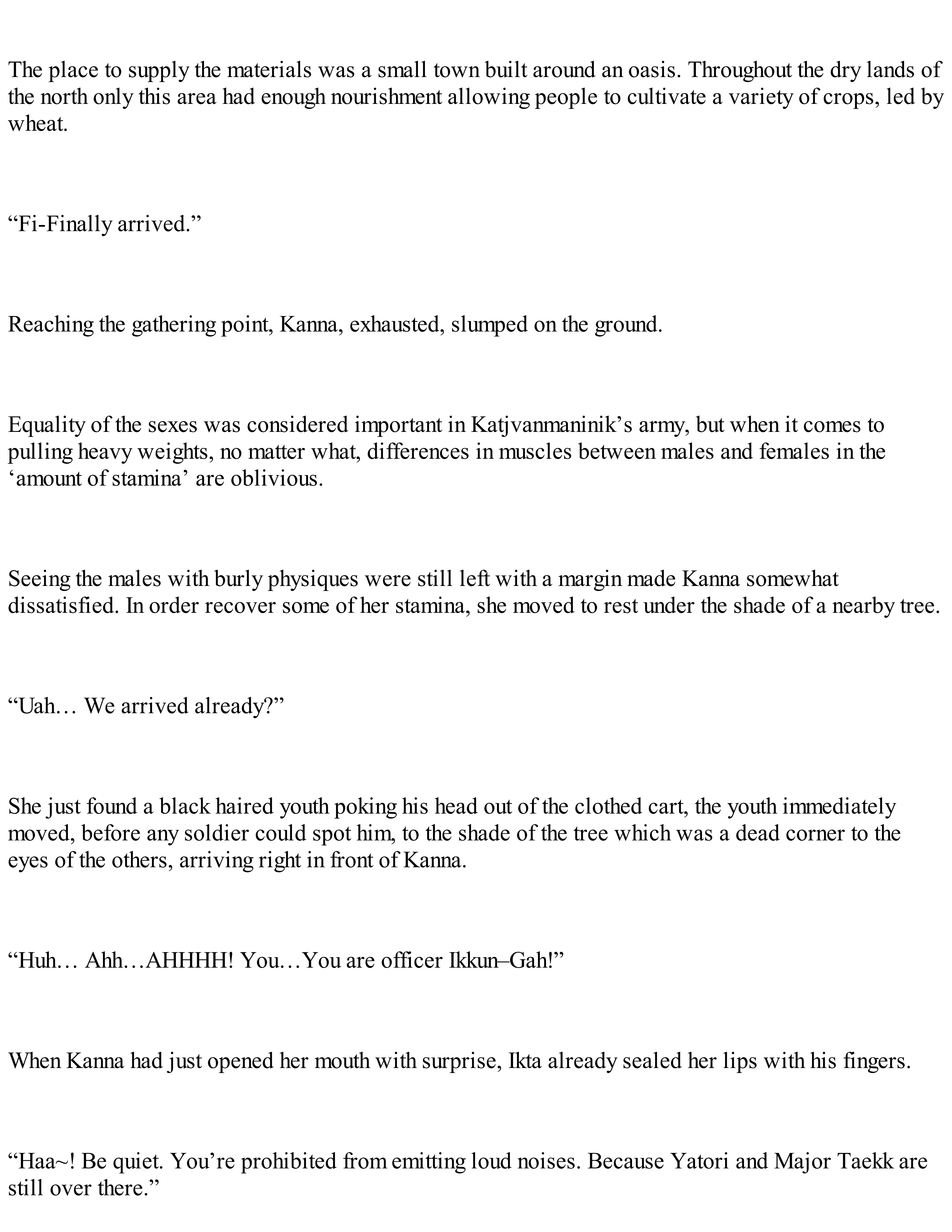
“…You really are frank with your words, Warrant Officer Yatorishino. Are you like this to all your superiors?”

“If I had said something inappropriate, please do forgive me.”

“No, to tell you the truth I feel refreshed… it’s rare to hear praises from youngsters, it even reignited some of my motivation. Although I can only teach you the military behavior in peacetime, but this and the soldiers lacking a sense of crisis, even if they perform similar actions, their condition is totally different… Cough… Cough Cough…”

A pained smile emerged on major Taekk’s thin face, Yatori too nodded solemnly to him as reply.

***


The place to supply the materials was a small town built around an oasis. Throughout the dry lands of the north only this area had enough nourishment allowing people to cultivate a variety of crops, led by wheat.

“Fi-Finally arrived.”

Reaching the gathering point, Kanna, exhausted, slumped on the ground.

Equality of the sexes was considered important in Katjvanmaninik’s army, but when it comes to pulling heavy weights, no matter what, differences in muscles between males and females in the ‘amount of stamina’ are oblivious.

Seeing the males with burly physiques were still left with a margin made Kanna somewhat dissatisfied. In order recover some of her stamina, she moved to rest under the shade of a nearby tree.

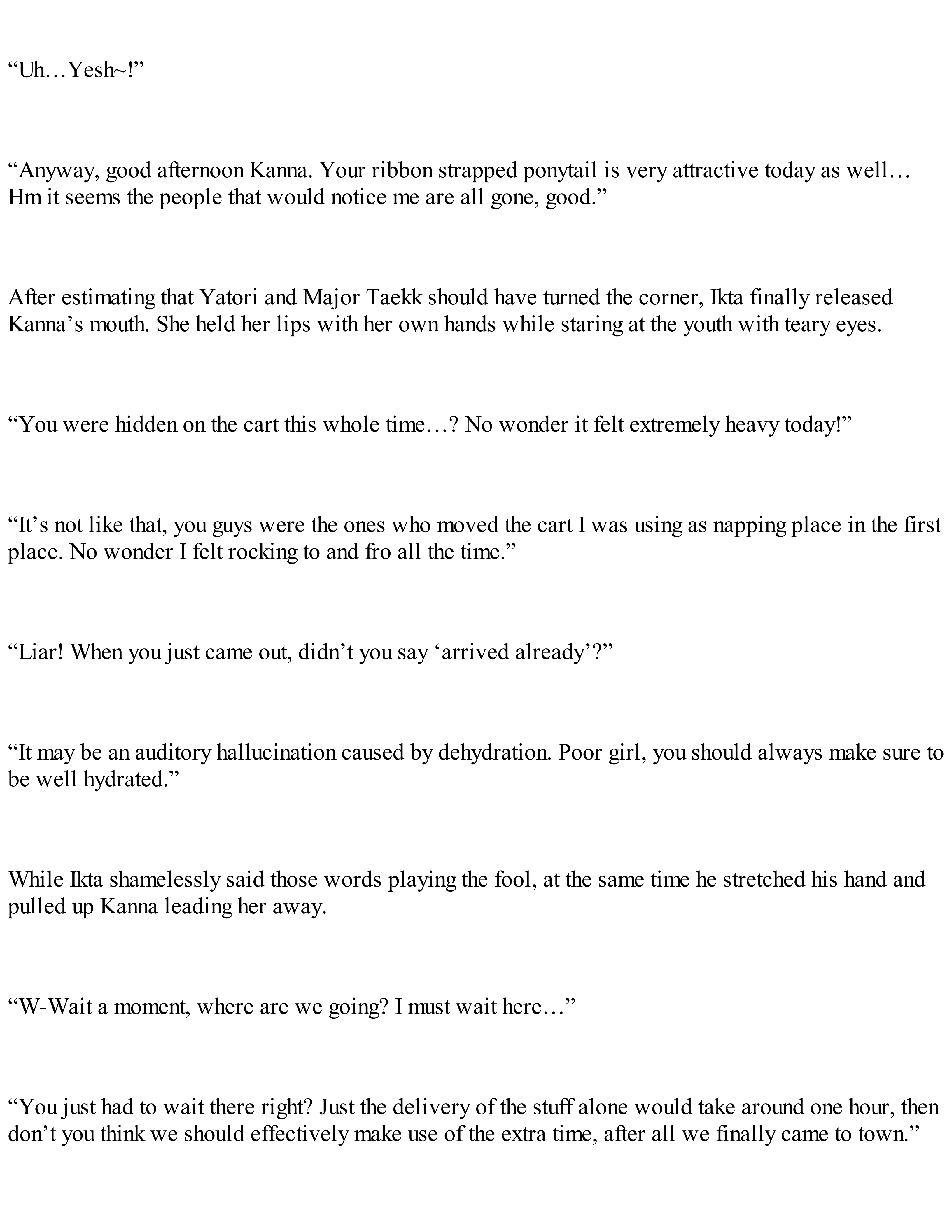
“Uah… We arrived already?”

She just found a black haired youth poking his head out of the clothed cart, the youth immediately moved, before any soldier could spot him, to the shade of the tree which was a dead corner to the eyes of the others, arriving right in front of Kanna.

“Huh… Ahh…AHHHH! You…You are officer Ikkun–Gah!”

When Kanna had just opened her mouth with surprise, Ikta already sealed her lips with his fingers.

“Haa~! Be quiet. You’re prohibited from emitting loud noises. Because Yatori and Major Taekk are still over there.”



“Uh…Yesh~!”

“Anyway, good afternoon Kanna. Your ribbon strapped ponytail is very attractive today as well… Hm it seems the people that would notice me are all gone, good.”

After estimating that Yatori and Major Taekk should have turned the corner, Ikta finally released Kanna’s mouth. She held her lips with her own hands while staring at the youth with teary eyes.

“You were hidden on the cart this whole time…? No wonder it felt extremely heavy today!”

“It’s not like that, you guys were the ones who moved the cart I was using as napping place in the first place. No wonder I felt rocking to and fro all the time.”

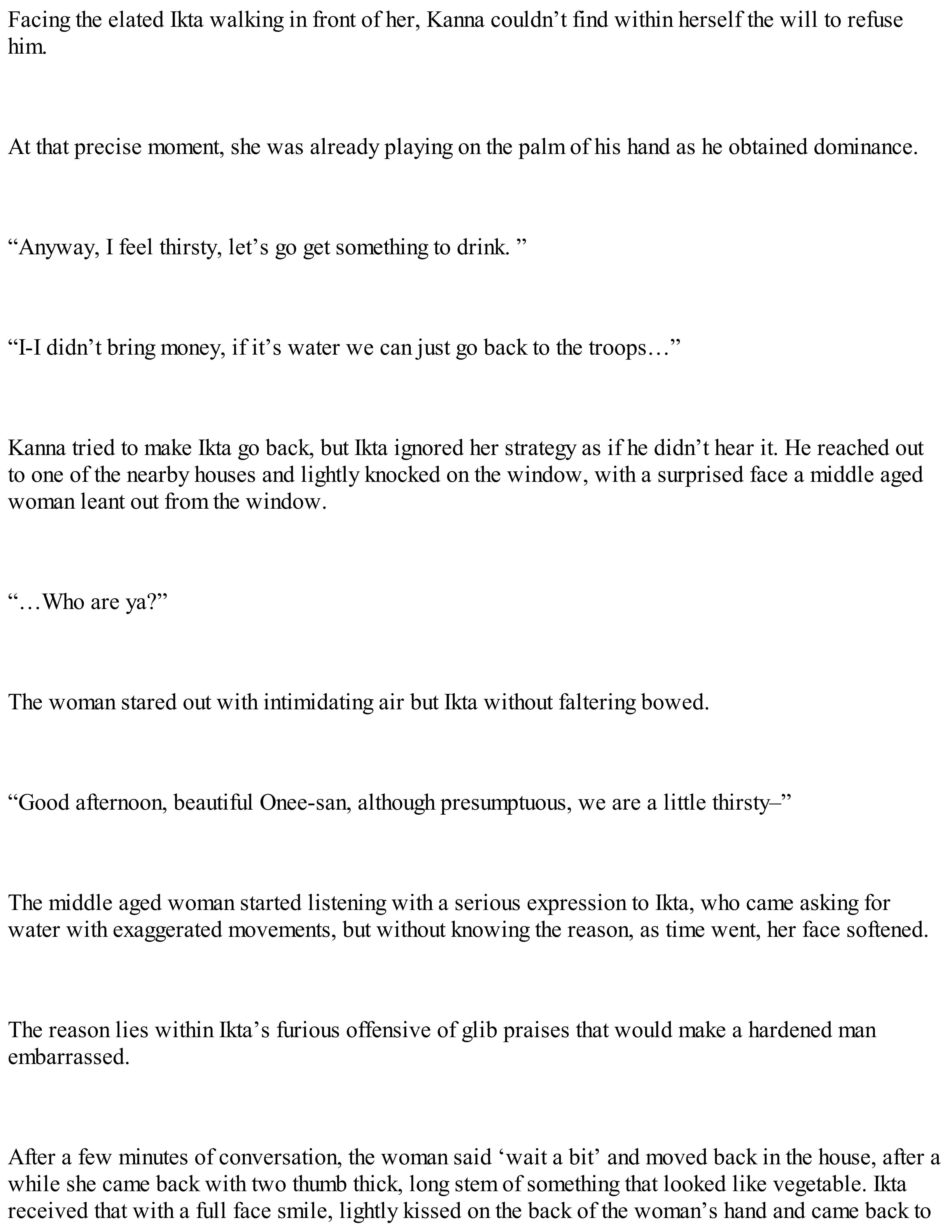
“Liar! When you just came out, didn’t you say ‘arrived already’?”

“It may be an auditory hallucination caused by dehydration. Poor girl, you should always make sure to be well hydrated.”

While Ikta shamelessly said those words playing the fool, at the same time he stretched his hand and pulled up Kanna leading her away.

“W-Wait a moment, where are we going? I must wait here…”

“You just had to wait there right? Just the delivery of the stuff alone would take around one hour, then don’t you think we should effectively make use of the extra time, after all we finally came to town.”


Facing the elated Ikta walking in front of her, Kanna couldn't find within herself the will to refuse him.

At that precise moment, she was already playing on the palm of his hand as he obtained dominance.

"Anyway, I feel thirsty, let's go get something to drink. "

"I-I didn't bring money, if it's water we can just go back to the troops…"

Kanna tried to make Ikta go back, but Ikta ignored her strategy as if he didn't hear it. He reached out to one of the nearby houses and lightly knocked on the window, with a surprised face a middle aged woman leant out from the window.

"…Who are ya?"

The woman stared out with intimidating air but Ikta without faltering bowed.

"Good afternoon, beautiful Onee-san, although presumptuous, we are a little thirsty–"

The middle aged woman started listening with a serious expression to Ikta, who came asking for water with exaggerated movements, but without knowing the reason, as time went, her face softened.

The reason lies within Ikta's furious offensive of glib praises that would make a hardened man embarrassed.

After a few minutes of conversation, the woman said 'wait a bit' and moved back in the house, after a while she came back with two thumb thick, long stem of something that looked like vegetable. Ikta received that with a full face smile, lightly kissed on the back of the woman's hand and came back to

Kanna.

“Kanna, look, look. I got sugarcanes from that beautiful woman. She also told me the directions to the well, let’s chew on this while we go look for that.”

Tl note: sugarcanes are chewed for their sweet taste in Asian countries, also brown sugar is extracted from them. Image

“…. is that so, officer Ikkun? Don’t tell me you are one of those so called playboy?”

“That’s a misconception, instead it’s me who has been captivated by all older women in the world.”

While receiving the sugarcane, she though this person’s quibbles were amazing.

This thing needed you to remove its hard outer bark before it could be consumed thus the two started doing so while walking forward.

“That woman didn’t mind my military outfit even after seeing it. The residents here do not hate soldiers nor excessively fear them.”

“Huh? Ah… yes, because this is an important supply point, so no matter which side, both desires friendly relationships…”

“To accomplish that, the military assumed a low profile as last resort. Is this Lieutenant General Safida’s ploy?”

Ikta bit into the sugarcane after removing the outer layer and asked the question while savoring the overflowing sweetness.

“Instead of it being Lieutenant General Safida’s ploy… I would say it is something Major Taekk planned. Because Lieutenant General threw all managerial and operational responsibilities to him.”

Kanna answered with dismissive actions. After thinking for a while, Ikta also nodded in understanding.

“So the leader is just decorations? After all, only the position of the supreme commander of the norther garrison could have been obtained on connections with nobles alone.”

In the Katjvanmaninik empire, the military officer ‘soldiers’ and the administrative officer ‘nobles’ are separated fields. Although there are few exceptions like knights, but the reality of soldiers controlling the nobles could never happen, so is vice versa. Not letting military and politics getting entangles, instead leaving each field to their respective experts, that was the correct legacy left us by the ‘loyal triad’.

“Getting the position of a high ranked official without any real accomplishment. Even if they fully implemented the practice of meritocracy in the imperial army to avoid such situation, those bad habits are still really hard to eradicate. The position of the supreme commander of the northern garrison must be the most overblown of such case.”

Lieutenant Safida was not born a noble, but the Safida family had a long history of being close to those in power. Therefore, the nobles came up with all kinds of ideas to help a person like him.

Of course the military felt disgusted by that. It would be a different matter if the person was actually capable, but the military of course didn’t want to leave a high ranking position to someone lacking.

However, they couldn’t ignore the noble’s pressure too– in such dilemma they found a compromise, and that was to entrust the actual duty of managing the garrison to reliable aides with robust capabilities.

“So you mean the aide chosen was Major Taekk. The lieutenant general is a decoration and the Major

is his watchdog?"

"This is a matter every soldier knows. The Lieutenant General just stays in the commander's room with a self-important look, in fact almost all the instructions come from Major Taekk's orders…. ah, but there is one exception."

"Exception?"

"Yes. Only the matters concerning the Shinaak tribe go through Lieutenant General Safida directly. It hasn't happened lately, but setting up the punitive units was such an example… also the Lieutenant General is the kind who likes to steal all credits so he often goes personally to the frontlines."

"So he likes war more than peace? Well those kind of people aren't rare among soldiers."

"Instead of saying Lieutenant General likes wars… I think it may be because he hates the Shinaak tribe? That's what I feel seeing his everyday demeanor."

Hearing Kanna's words an image popped in Ikta's mind… the spirits packed like canned sardines in that dark cell. Those should be something the Lieutenant General took from the Shinaak tribe.

"If he understands he has been put in an empty, useless position, the oppression against the Shinaak tribe may in the end just be a way to release his anger… no matter what he is still a superior, and Major Taekk couldn't do anything but comply."

Ikta frowned with an unhappy expression while chewing on the sugarcane.

When he was just about to finish consuming the almost twenty centimeters long sugarcane, they arrived to the public well they were looking for.

It was a small well with two rope bound buckets nearby.

"Forget it, that doesn't concern us. Since this is a rare occasion, let's talk about something more interesting."

Ikta changed the topic while pulling up the bucket he threw in with the rope and pulley. In front of him, Kanna, doing the same action, faced Ikta with a question, just like what the other wanted.

"…Then, may I ask you a question officer Ikkun?"

"Sure, a side note, the right side of my bed is still empty today."

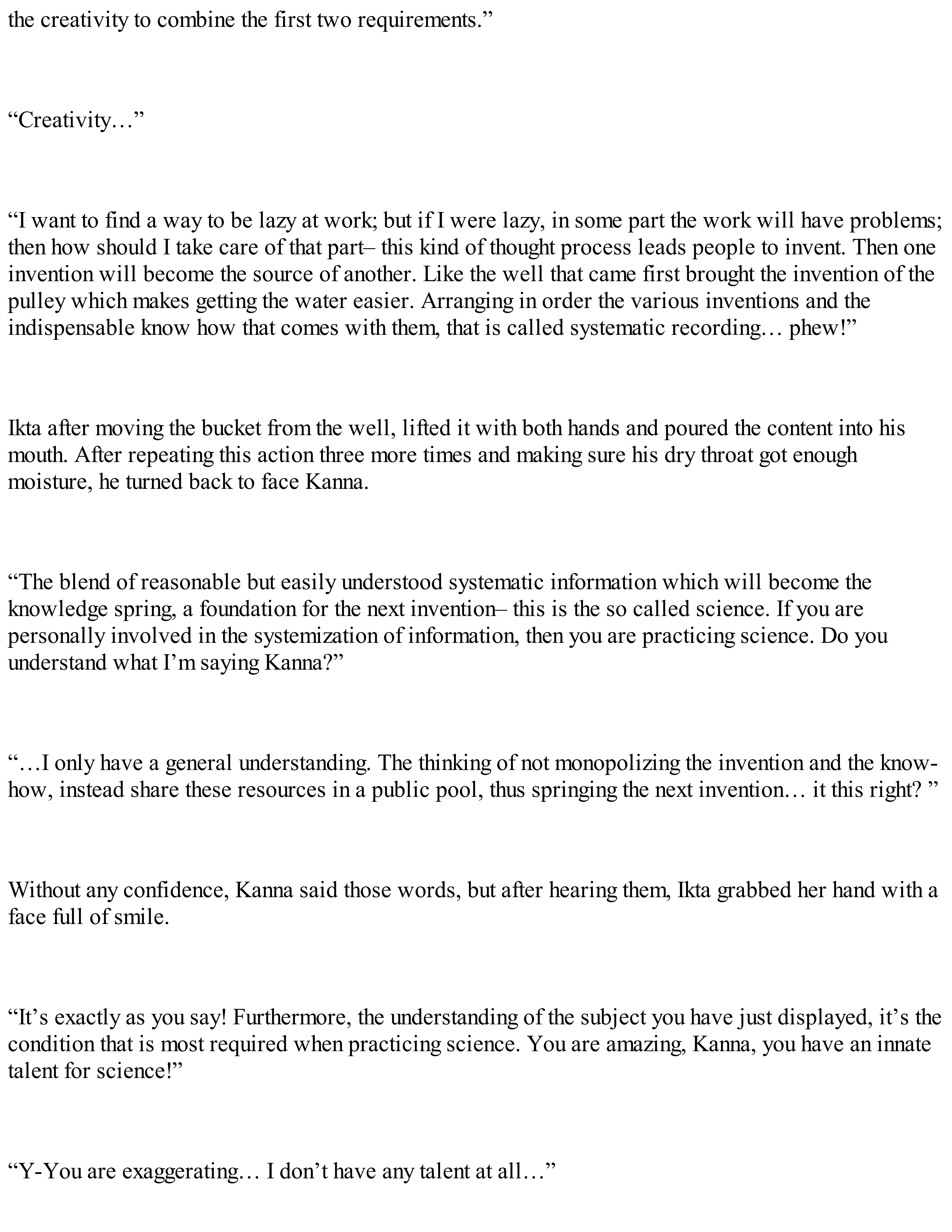
"B-Bed…? N-No it's not about that… that, can you tell me what is 'Science'?"

Kanna asked, remembering the first page of that book. Ikta answered without stopping his hands pulling on the ropes.

"For example this well– it is the product of human intellect right? With this they could get the water needed for a living without going to faraway river or lakes. Another example is this pulley– the design stabilizes the rope that pass through it so the water in the bucket will not splash out when you finally draw it out. Whichever, they are objects that makes life easier."

"Oh…it certainly is so."

"But, inventions such as this are not something that just appears one day, there are three indispensable conditions. The first is laziness, the natural feeling you get when you are given hard work. The second is awareness– the ability to understand which part of work is most tiresome. The third condition is


the creativity to combine the first two requirements."

"Creativity…"

"I want to find a way to be lazy at work; but if I were lazy, in some part the work will have problems; then how should I take care of that part– this kind of thought process leads people to invent. Then one invention will become the source of another. Like the well that came first brought the invention of the pulley which makes getting the water easier. Arranging in order the various inventions and the indispensable know how that comes with them, that is called systematic recording… phew!"

Ikta after moving the bucket from the well, lifted it with both hands and poured the content into his mouth. After repeating this action three more times and making sure his dry throat got enough moisture, he turned back to face Kanna.

"The blend of reasonable but easily understood systematic information which will become the knowledge spring, a foundation for the next invention– this is the so called science. If you are personally involved in the systemization of information, then you are practicing science. Do you understand what I'm saying Kanna?"

"…I only have a general understanding. The thinking of not monopolizing the invention and the know-how, instead share these resources in a public pool, thus springing the next invention… it this right? "

Without any confidence, Kanna said those words, but after hearing them, Ikta grabbed her hand with a face full of smile.

"It's exactly as you say! Furthermore, the understanding of the subject you have just displayed, it's the condition that is most required when practicing science. You are amazing, Kanna, you have an innate talent for science!"

"Y-You are exaggerating… I don't have any talent at all…"

“No, I’m sure you have it. Because you are my junior apprentice, how can my junior lack in talent.”

I don’t remember being your junior… Kanna couldn’t speak out these thoughts after seeing his pure smile. Ikta made use of Kanna’s kindness and proceeded speaking:

“Oh right, I also have something I want to ask you, it’s the conversation that was interrupted last time. I say, after reading that book, which part of the Alderah Church you find interesting?”

That book– the book that inconceivably knotted the fate of a High Grade Military Officer Cadet to that of a soldier, written by Anarai Khan, the <Records of Grand Arfatra>. Kanna while recalling its content, started answering:

“Uh, that book mentioned a lot of differences between the spirit beliefs of the Shinaak tribe and the Alderah faith…”

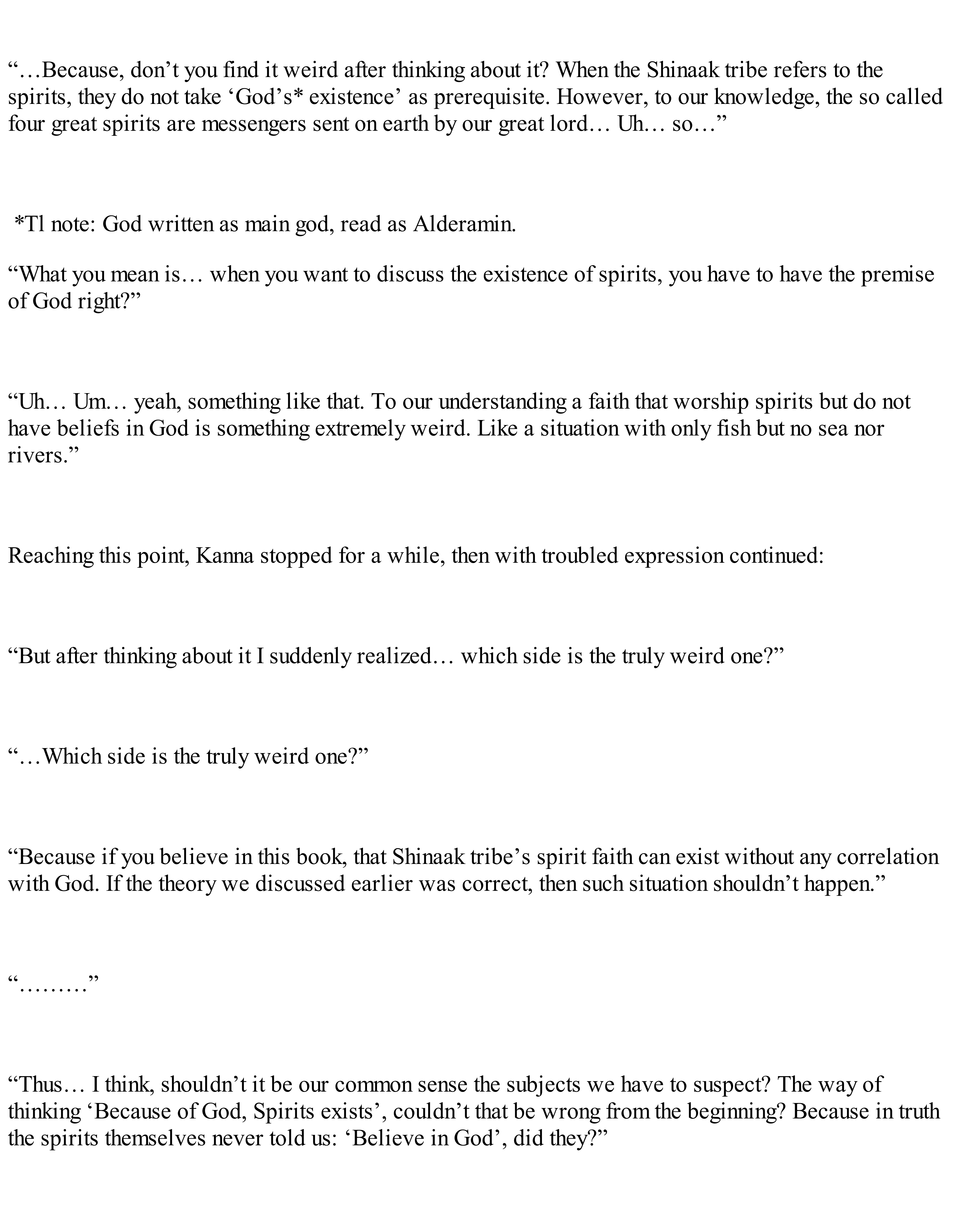
The Shinaak tribe have a different religion from the empire’s ‘Alderah Church’, it’s called ‘Spirit faith’. An attentive analysis of such religion was one of Anarai Khan’s most focused theme.

“Hm.”

“Although the narrative was also very interesting… but since long ago I had questions regarding the part about the origin.”

“Origin… what do you mean?”

Seeing Ikta is looking at her with probing eyes, Kanna desperately tried to find the appropriate words.



“…Because, don’t you find it weird after thinking about it? When the Shinaak tribe refers to the spirits, they do not take ‘God’s* existence’ as prerequisite. However, to our knowledge, the so called four great spirits are messengers sent on earth by our great lord… Uh… so…”

*Tl note: God written as main god, read as Alderamin.

“What you mean is… when you want to discuss the existence of spirits, you have to have the premise of God right?”

“Uh… Um… yeah, something like that. To our understanding a faith that worship spirits but do not have beliefs in God is something extremely weird. Like a situation with only fish but no sea nor rivers.”

Reaching this point, Kanna stopped for a while, then with troubled expression continued:

“But after thinking about it I suddenly realized… which side is the truly weird one?”

“…Which side is the truly weird one?”

“Because if you believe in this book, that Shinaak tribe’s spirit faith can exist without any correlation with God. If the theory we discussed earlier was correct, then such situation shouldn’t happen.”

“………”

“Thus… I think, shouldn’t it be our common sense the subjects we have to suspect? The way of thinking ‘Because of God, Spirits exists’, couldn’t that be wrong from the beginning? Because in truth the spirits themselves never told us: ‘Believe in God’, did they?”

Kanna unconsciously said something that would probably make people faint if heard by Alderah devotees.

“It was also written in the book that our Alderah beliefs and their Spirits beliefs content are completely different. After all, the backbone of the Alderah faith is that believers must abide by the rules set by our great God. Like how we have to do this, we mustn’t do that or something we have to restrain ourselves about…”

“What you are talking about is ‘religious laws’, that is the term from the book.”

“Ah…yes, it’s that. In contrast in Shinaak tribe’s spirit belief there are no such pyramidal organization…so…in other words… it is….”

“Kanna, don’t be so agitated. You can slowly choose words to say and explain things one by one.”

Ikta with a calming tone told Kanna who couldn’t finish her sentences because of how anxious she was. After calming down, she took in a deep breath before continuing:

“…in Shinaak tribe’s spirit belief there are no such pyramidal organization. Instead they just simply show gratefulness toward the four great spirits who are considered ‘Love of the World’ and do various rituals to show gratitude, only those… as for laws dictating what or what not to do, it seems those are decided by the chief and the council… and has nothing to do with spirits.”

Without noticing Ikta’s eyes, which were looking more surprised as time passes, Kanna concluded her argument:

“If it is as that book says, the Alderah faith and the spirits faith are two completely different things… then at the same time God and the four great spirits are different existences…in addition of them being messengers of God, the true identity of these children may also be completely different? This is what I think.”



Kanna finished expressing herself while petting the partner at her waist. She was feeling uneasy as she didn't know if she conveyed her thoughts, but that was an unnecessary worry.

"The spirits will never tell us to believe in God, this is what you mean right? Kanna."

Ikta's voice was trembling. He slowly reached out with his hands and placed them on Kanna's palm.

"…You really are great. You dispelled God's curse, Kanna. And you did it almost completely by yourself!"

"G-God's curse?"

"This curse is the crucial difference that separates Science from Theology. Stubbornly denying truth that does not comply with God's will, while only making use of those favorable to god… their paranoia distorted the truth. Obliviously if they are not able to throw away such indoctrination, humanity will never be able to step forward on the road of science!"

Finishing speaking, Ikta didn't bother with the surrounding gazes anymore and started dancing while holding Kanna's hands.

"You are right Kanna! If there truly is a supreme God, then his first words would have been ordering us to 'be lazy'! All other God's commands are all fakes! Ideology that should be thrown away, made by those in power!"

"Huh…officer Ikkun…? I-I didn't say so mu–"

In the state he is now, these words didn't enter Ikta's ear. He continued dancing happily like he is

converting his present feelings into movements, producing a messy, creative and unrestrained dance.

Kanna couldn't do anything but follow him… however she found out that being together with the youth in front of her was not a cause of trouble for her.

–Ah, so this Nii-chan is a lot more childish than what he appears to be.

Kanna Temari intuitively comprehended that… the carefree boy in front of him must have been using this method to seduce others. Getting people to participate in science, lazing around in the right way–this behavior to lure others into depravation, it must be his way of showing affection.

–Science is really fun you know, so Kanna you should join too.

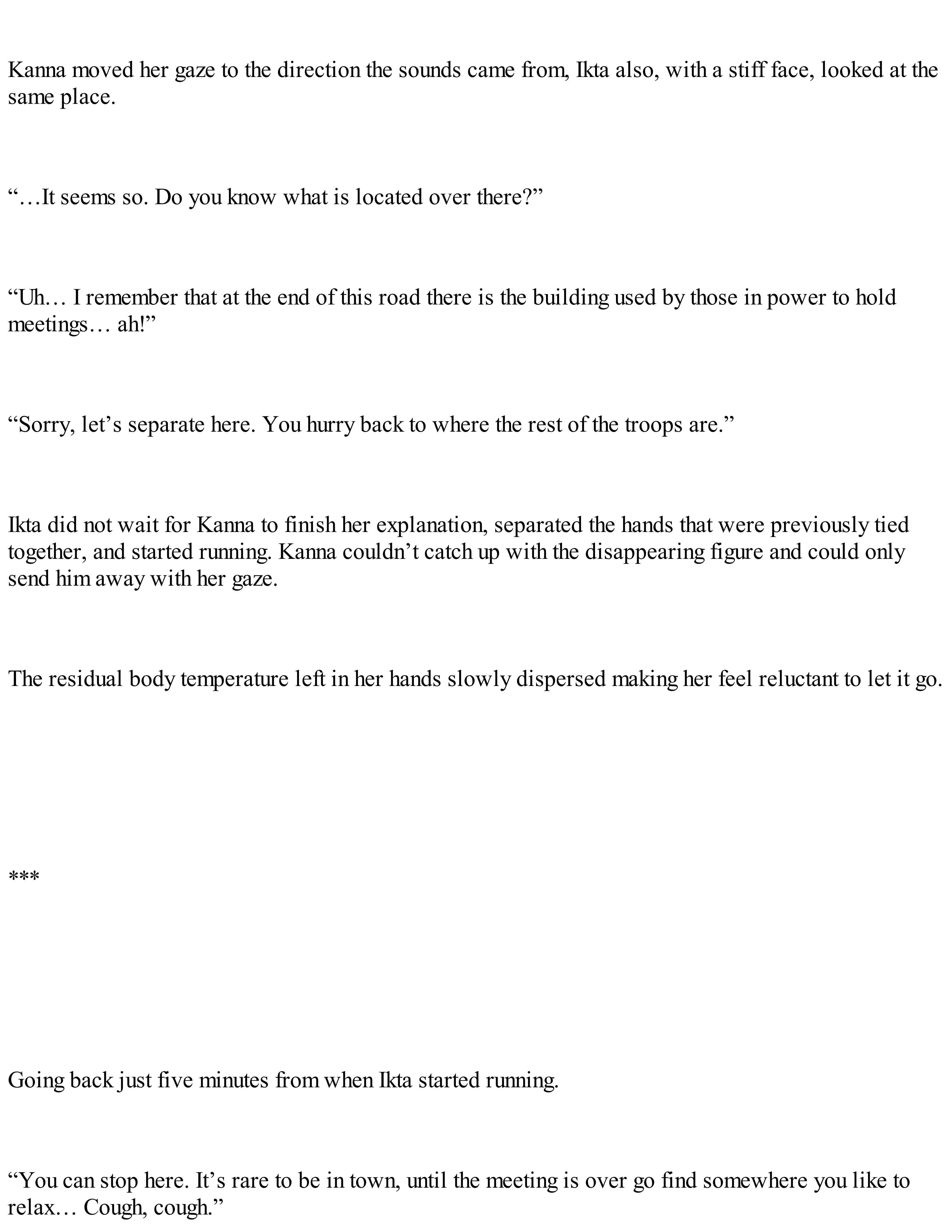
The kid who invited the one he liked to participate in this special game. After wiping away the simple tricks he shows on the surface, Ikta's loving nature could be encompassed with one sentence. Many people, after noticing his true nature of naivety and innocence, hidden beneath the mischievous mask…will find themselves unable to have anything but good impressions about him.

"…Haha, Ikkun sure is a weird person."

When that incredible feeling diffused in her chest, she found it natural to omit the honorifics in addressing him. The one in front of her right now, is but a two years' younger teenager worth caring about.

They originally thought the time seemed to go on forever, but a sudden scream brought it to an end. The youth's smile dispersed. It was followed by a roar that reverberated in the area coupled with sharp sounds of swords clashing.

"…? W-What was that just then? Did something happen over there…?"



Kanna moved her gaze to the direction the sounds came from, Ikta also, with a stiff face, looked at the same place.

"…It seems so. Do you know what is located over there?"

"Uh… I remember that at the end of this road there is the building used by those in power to hold meetings… ah!"

"Sorry, let's separate here. You hurry back to where the rest of the troops are."

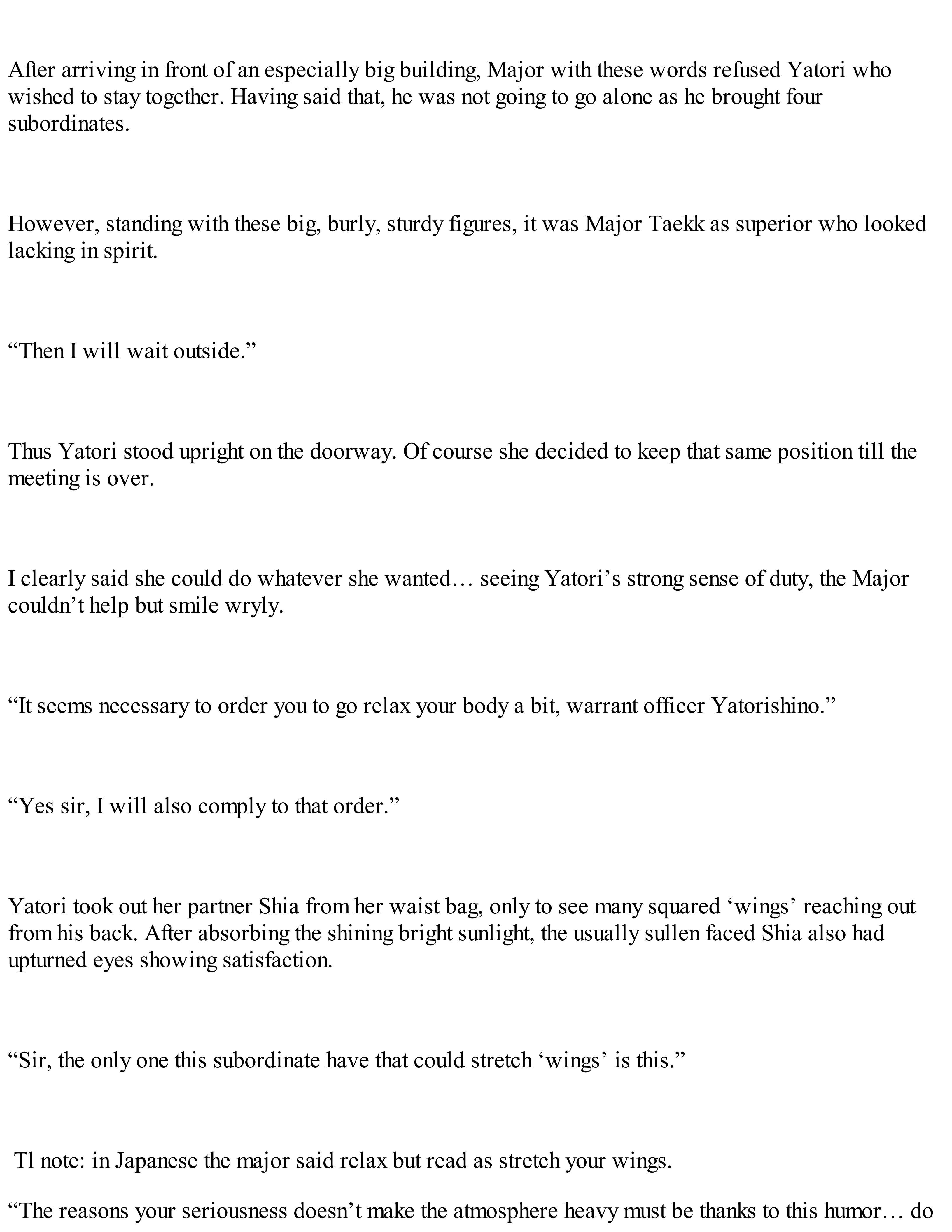
Ikta did not wait for Kanna to finish her explanation, separated the hands that were previously tied together, and started running. Kanna couldn't catch up with the disappearing figure and could only send him away with her gaze.

The residual body temperature left in her hands slowly dispersed making her feel reluctant to let it go.

***

Going back just five minutes from when Ikta started running.

"You can stop here. It's rare to be in town, until the meeting is over go find somewhere you like to relax… Cough, cough."



After arriving in front of an especially big building, Major with these words refused Yatori who wished to stay together. Having said that, he was not going to go alone as he brought four subordinates.

However, standing with these big, burly, sturdy figures, it was Major Taekk as superior who looked lacking in spirit.

“Then I will wait outside.”

Thus Yatori stood upright on the doorway. Of course she decided to keep that same position till the meeting is over.

I clearly said she could do whatever she wanted… seeing Yatori’s strong sense of duty, the Major couldn’t help but smile wryly.

“It seems necessary to order you to go relax your body a bit, warrant officer Yatorishino.”

“Yes sir, I will also comply to that order.”

Yatori took out her partner Shia from her waist bag, only to see many squared ‘wings’ reaching out from his back. After absorbing the shining bright sunlight, the usually sullen faced Shia also had upturned eyes showing satisfaction.

“Sir, the only one this subordinate have that could stretch ‘wings’ is this.”

Tl note: in Japanese the major said relax but read as stretch your wings.

“The reasons your seriousness doesn’t make the atmosphere heavy must be thanks to this humor… do

as you wish."

Major Taekk turned away and walked forward. It seems she is different from her father– that was the Major's thought about Yatori. If it was that person, he wouldn't leave room for interpretation to orders. No matter if he was in the position of giving or receiving orders, that famous general would still adhere in being the incarnation of discipline.

To tell the truth, Major Taekk didn't like paying attention to youngsters.

Almost every year High Grade Military Officer Cadets will flock to his side, and go back after learning seven tenths of boredom, two tenths of disillusionment and one tenths of actual military knowledge.

No matter how hard work it is to run military units at borders, to those elites, the northern territory is but a simple stepping stone, some place they wish to go through as soon as possible.

Major Taekk could understand very well their feelings, because he himself was once one of those.

Around twenty years ago, Major Taekk was also a High Grade Military Officer cadet. After finishing the High Grade Academy, directly passed the High Grade Military Exam, with a heart filled of loyalty and ambitions, a young man who had just started the life journey of a soldier.

From the results, he had long deviated from the road of success. Although major Taekk is currently forty-six years old, it is essentially impossible to climb further in rank in the lifetime he has left. The aide to the supreme commander of the norther region is just such a position. Having mixed feelings of admiration and envy when seeing youngsters with bright futures is just an inevitable reaction.

Major Taekk's current status is to be a substitute to the supreme commander who obtained his position through noble's support and with no actual strength, while resolving the financial troubles and the populace's doubts, he also had to properly manage the garrison.

–If it wasn’t for this, he would have long retired and started his life anew.

Furthermore, when he recalled how he suffered from the chronic lung disease, Major Taekk could only sigh. That was also one of the reasons that deviated him from the road of success. The disease was not advancing, nor there was the possibility of curing it completely, the symptoms just grow with age. For how many years more could he keep lying about his physical condition and keep working?

–It’s only, well no matter. If there is something that could become a role model for the younger generations, then there would still be a value in forcing himself to keep at it.

Being proud of his lack in combat experience, thinking that as the result of maintaining peace in the northern region– thinking back of Warrant Officer Yatorishino who indirectly praised him made major Taekk smile unconsciously.

“How come today’s welcoming hasn’t come yet?” his subordinate interrupted his thoughts in an unhappy voice. After passing through the gates and entering the inner building, they were left foolishly waiting at the entrance and no answer came even after their repeated calls. The major also felt it was natural his subordinate was irritated.

“Maybe they had some urgent matters and couldn’t leave. But we came here out of our own volition… we don’t have to wait here at the entrance like idiots.”

After the major finished saying so, he led the way to the inner side of the building. Since he already memorized the planimetry in his previous visits, without hesitation he walked to the big room situated ahead of them. He thought they would be stopped midway by someone, but that didn’t happen.

After walking for twenty seconds, the group arrived at their objective.

“I beg pardon for my rudeness, I am Yuskushiram Taekk coming from the base in stead of the supreme

commander–"

Major Taekk had just walked into the room greeting whoever was inside but after a second, stench of blood filled his nostrils making him stop his feet out of caution.

In front of him was the body of a sturdy man collapsed on the big table placed in the center of the room. You could tell he was dead at first glance, because he had a deep wound going from head to the spine.

"…Immediately retreat to the outside!"

From someone who hasn't stood in battle for long times, Major Taekk's judgement could be thought as fast and correct. But his choice was to 'backtrack', it was also the most oblivious choice, to some extent this action was also predicted by the enemy.

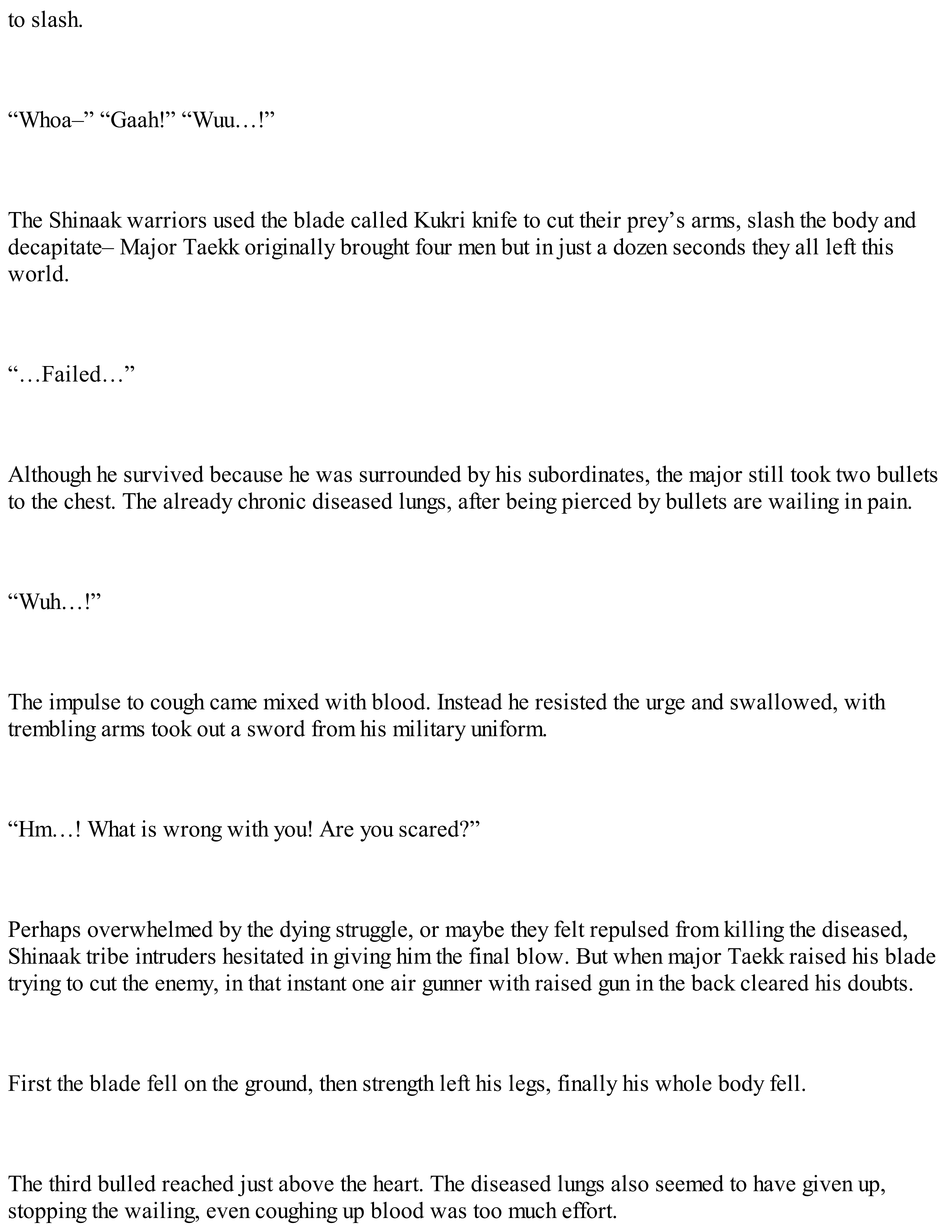
The major and his men tried to run back the corridor together, however the assassins appeared one after another in front of them from the shadows. Half of them were wielding half-length air guns suitable for indoor uses; the other half had a unique 'く shaped' knife weapon at their side. There were even those with blood stains, probably the result of what happened in that room.

Tl note: see kukri

Although the culprits' short-sleeved face covering attire was very unique as well, the thing that caught most attention was their skin which was of a darker color than the average empire man. Without doubts, this is proof of living on the faraway highlands closer to the sun, that is people living on the lands of the Grand Arfatra mountain range.

"These guys, they are from Shinaak Tri–"

Before the soldiers could react, the air gun armed intruders fired a flurry of bullets. Then while taking advantage of the retreating soldiers, the gunners are switched with swordsmen which rushed forward


to slash.

“Whoa–” “Gaah!” “Wuu…!”

The Shinaak warriors used the blade called Kukri knife to cut their prey’s arms, slash the body and decapitate– Major Taekk originally brought four men but in just a dozen seconds they all left this world.

“…Failed…”

Although he survived because he was surrounded by his subordinates, the major still took two bullets to the chest. The already chronic diseased lungs, after being pierced by bullets are wailing in pain.

“Wuh…!”

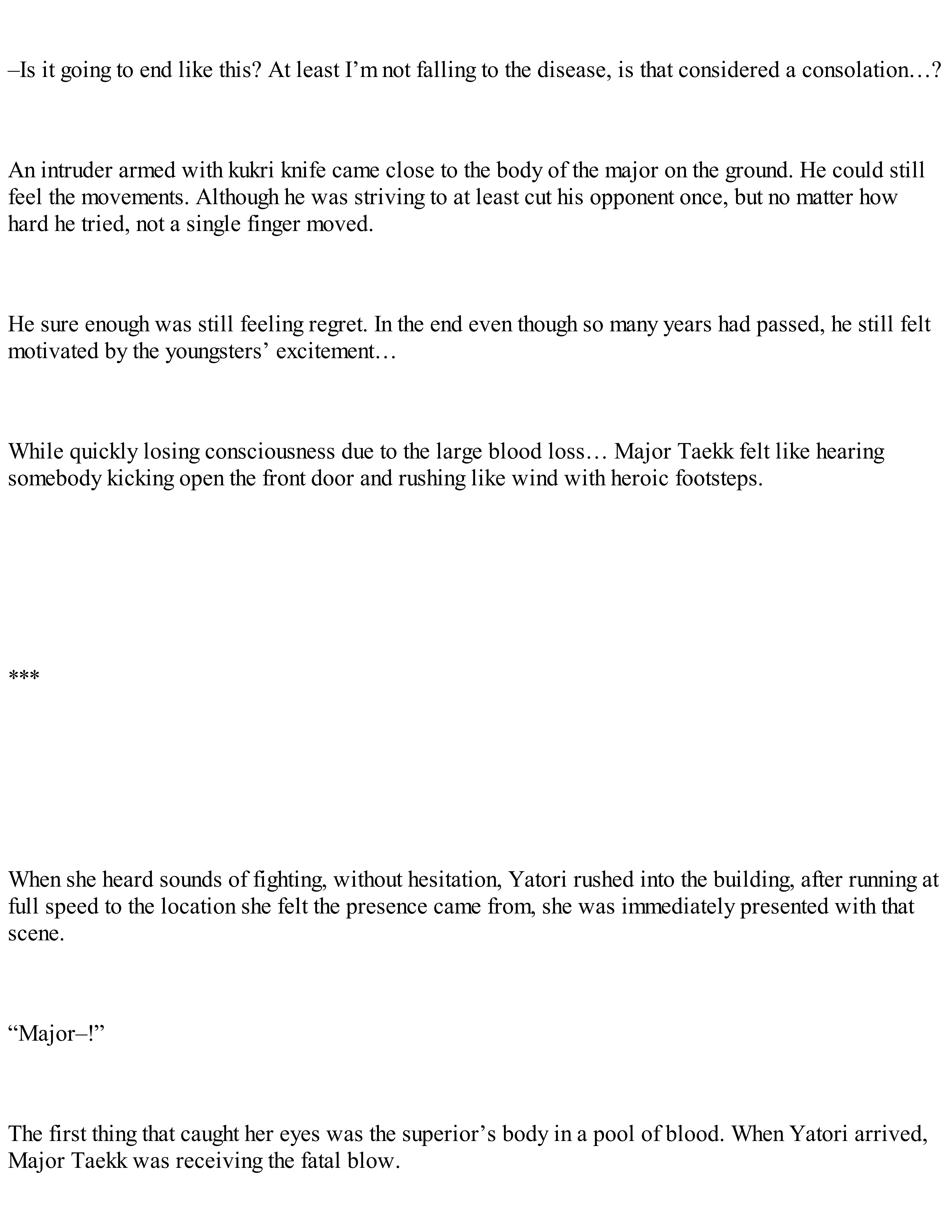
The impulse to cough came mixed with blood. Instead he resisted the urge and swallowed, with trembling arms took out a sword from his military uniform.

“Hm…! What is wrong with you! Are you scared?”

Perhaps overwhelmed by the dying struggle, or maybe they felt repulsed from killing the diseased, Shinaak tribe intruders hesitated in giving him the final blow. But when major Taekk raised his blade trying to cut the enemy, in that instant one air gunner with raised gun in the back cleared his doubts.

First the blade fell on the ground, then strength left his legs, finally his whole body fell.

The third bulled reached just above the heart. The diseased lungs also seemed to have given up, stopping the wailing, even coughing up blood was too much effort.



–Is it going to end like this? At least I’m not falling to the disease, is that considered a consolation…?

An intruder armed with kukri knife came close to the body of the major on the ground. He could still feel the movements. Although he was striving to at least cut his opponent once, but no matter how hard he tried, not a single finger moved.

He sure enough was still feeling regret. In the end even though so many years had passed, he still felt motivated by the youngsters’ excitement…

While quickly losing consciousness due to the large blood loss… Major Taekk felt like hearing somebody kicking open the front door and rushing like wind with heroic footsteps.

***

When she heard sounds of fighting, without hesitation, Yatori rushed into the building, after running at full speed to the location she felt the presence came from, she was immediately presented with that scene.

“Major–!”

The first thing that caught her eyes was the superior’s body in a pool of blood. When Yatori arrived, Major Taekk was receiving the fatal blow.

The ＜ shaped knife was extracted from his ribs, spraying fresh blood. The intruders caught in the blood are observing with sharp eyes the prey that had just appeared.

Even when facing many, Yatori advanced without hesitation– if you wanted to act, it was obliviously the best if you had the first move. And if you want to reach the enemies, then it would be too slow to start moving after readying your swords.

The conclusion she arrived at was– readying her swords and slashing while closing in to the enemy…!

The blades arrived at their target two breaths before what the enemy had expected. Yatori's attack bypassed the sword the enemy raised to parry, and laterally swept through his neck. Huge amount of blood gushed out from the severed carotid– she who continued her attack, used her short sword to stab at his heart. The body of the enemy who originally intended to resist, lost all strength in an instant.



Seeing their companion's death, the intruders sought revenge by attacking Yatori, and she replied accordingly. After turning her body, the two swords engaged the enemy while avoiding their attacks, catching a moment of vulnerability caused by the confusion of the battle, the sharp blades performed a counterattack.

The air-gunners in the back of course hesitated to shoot at this target who was constantly moving between comrades and couldn't be aimed at.

The enemy leader, noticing the current situation was far from good, ordered his companions to temporally get some distance from the foe. The bullets came at the same time from the openings created, but Yatori calmly used the corpse of the man she took down at the beginning as a shield.

Normal air guns are not equipped with such power to perforate a human body.

The status quo fell into a stalemate with the parties staring at each other… however, this was a beneficial development for Yatori. Since they had been making such ruckus, her companions, noticing the disturbance would reach there sooner or later. That way the side with superior numbers will be hers while the enemy would become the minority, then with smooth actions they could capture them all alive.

"…Let's retreat. We have archived our goal already."

However, it appeared that the enemy understood the situation as well. It was as if the man who looked like their leader could tone down his emotions, and managed to give order to his companions with blood-shot eyes full of revenge.

The companions made protest with their eyes but the leader shook his head and spoke a decisive statement.

“Did you forget chief Nanak’s orders?… Before the holy war, do not risk. Retreat!”

It began after the order, the intruders one after another disappeared in the opposite direction Yatori was. They intended to use the back door or the windows, anyway sought an escape route diverse from the front door.

Even if it was Yatori, she wouldn’t rush to give chase alone. She first put the body of the intruder she used as a shield on the ground, then rushed to Major Taekk’s side, stretched her arm toward the neck and made sure there were no pulse anymore.

The sorrowful look on her face lasted only an instant, she then immediately stood straight and made a salute to the departed. Mourning the man who even at the end didn’t receive any return from his lifetime achievements, and his military spirit that even at death didn’t allow him to let go of his military knife.

“…. Please leave the rest to me, Major Taekk– I will now continue pursue the enemy!”

Yatori after firmly stating so, turned away and ran straight for the door, rushed out of the building without hesitation.

***

As if changing shifts, when the girl had just rushed out of the door, a young man slipped in from a window on the corridor, at the sight of the six bodies lying in the corridor–Ikta Sorlok snorted with a ‘Whoa’ sound.

“What is this? Almost all of them are empire military, is this the work of those who just ran away?”

“Please be careful, Ikta. Enemies may still be inside.”

Ikta, while listening to Kusu’s advices, at the same time checked every single room within the building.

A male who looked like the owner in the conference room, five females who looked like maids in the next room, also an old couple at the corner of the stairway leading to the second floor, all these people were leaking blood from the head or chest and were already deceased.

“On the first floor*, five men from the empire’s military and a Shinaak Tribe man who should be with the culprits. Just looking around I found fourteen bodies… the inhabitants of this house were all massacred.”

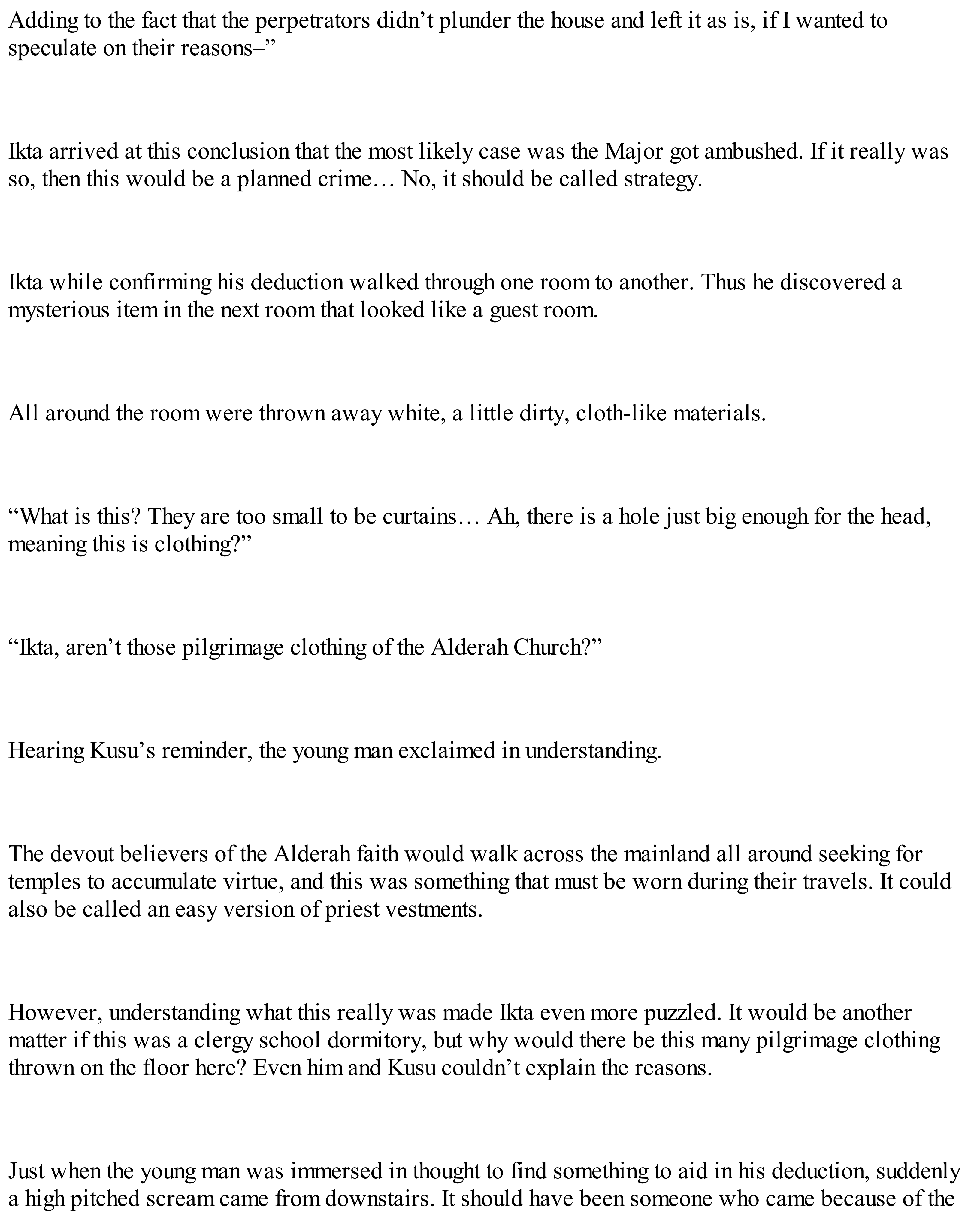
*Tl note: or ground floor depending on where you live

After getting a gist of this tragedy, Ikta crooked his head as if there was something wrong.

“But, it’s really weird. From the state of the drying blood… the death time of the family members should have been much earlier that the military’s downstairs.”

Speaking of which, the intruders were able to kill everyone in this house without the neighbors noticing. Ikta thought the other party had to be really agile, furthermore he hadn’t seen any trace of plundering on valuables, with these observation, the chances of it being thieves aiming for money was really low.

“…Although with crimes committed by the Shinaak Tribe are not uncommon in this area, it’s hard to believe that the attack just had to happen when Major Taekk was visiting and is a pure coincidence.



Adding to the fact that the perpetrators didn't plunder the house and left it as is, if I wanted to speculate on their reasons–"

Ikta arrived at this conclusion that the most likely case was the Major got ambushed. If it really was so, then this would be a planned crime… No, it should be called strategy.

Ikta while confirming his deduction walked through one room to another. Thus he discovered a mysterious item in the next room that looked like a guest room.

All around the room were thrown away white, a little dirty, cloth-like materials.

"What is this? They are too small to be curtains… Ah, there is a hole just big enough for the head, meaning this is clothing?"

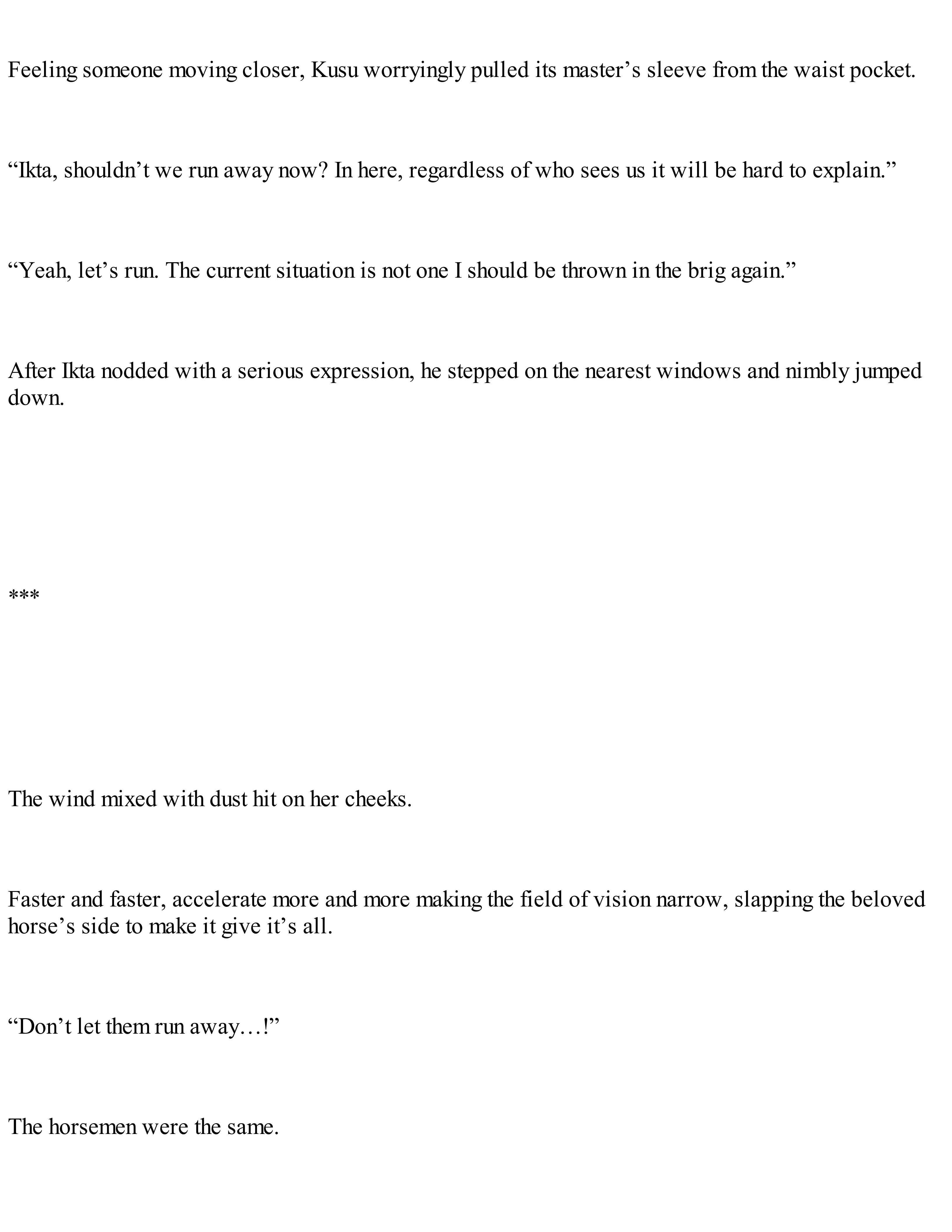
"Ikta, aren't those pilgrimage clothing of the Alderah Church?"

Hearing Kusu's reminder, the young man exclaimed in understanding.

The devout believers of the Alderah faith would walk across the mainland all around seeking for temples to accumulate virtue, and this was something that must be worn during their travels. It could also be called an easy version of priest vestments.

However, understanding what this really was made Ikta even more puzzled. It would be another matter if this was a clergy school dormitory, but why would there be this many pilgrimage clothing thrown on the floor here? Even him and Kusu couldn't explain the reasons.

Just when the young man was immersed in thought to find something to aid in his deduction, suddenly a high pitched scream came from downstairs. It should have been someone who came because of the disturbance and found the macabre spectacle downstairs right?



Feeling someone moving closer, Kusu worryingly pulled its master’s sleeve from the waist pocket.

“Ikta, shouldn’t we run away now? In here, regardless of who sees us it will be hard to explain.”

“Yeah, let’s run. The current situation is not one I should be thrown in the brig again.”

After Ikta nodded with a serious expression, he stepped on the nearest windows and nimbly jumped down.

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The wind mixed with dust hit on her cheeks.

Faster and faster, accelerate more and more making the field of vision narrow, slapping the beloved horse’s side to make it give it’s all.

“Don’t let them run away…!”

The horsemen were the same.

Yatori who was straddled on the horse with a leaning forward position, put in more strength into the hands holding the reins. Leading the cavalry unit behind, she stared at the back of the intruders in front of her.

After confirming Major Taekk's death and rushing out of the building, Yatori left the job of preserving the crime scene and reporting to HQ to her subordinates, she herself took command and mobilized the cavalry unit in pursuit of the fleeing enemies. Compared to the peas sized figures they were chasing twenty minutes ago, the distance between the two sides has now been greatly shortened.

"No, do not slow down! The moment they get to the mountain it's over!"

The condition of the road below was obliviously bad to the point to be impossible to rectify. If you wanted to avoid the horses tripping over the rocks, while at the same time keep rushing forward with that kind of speed, you would need extraordinary skills and guts. Even among the veteran cavalry unit whom should have already accumulated plenty of experiences, there were those who lagged behind.

However, Yatori thought– If we are not keeping this speed, the distance wouldn't shorten at all!

"Everybody, raise your long-ranged weapons! Start a volley aiming for the enemy's left, after that prepare for melee combat!"

In response to Yatori's orders, a group of soldiers raised their air guns, the majority however immediately raised the crossbow. The hard to aim shooting while on horseback was just an opening event, the main action was the spear assault after that– numbers of soldiers, quality of the horses, the remaining stamina, all the elements were in our favor. If we further attacked from their weaker side, then without doubts it will become the formula of victory.

Yatori made this judgement with confidence.

However, just as she was about to give the orders to 'shoot!', Yatori had to forcibly hold back the voice that almost leaked out. That was because behind the boulders the enemy was running to, a figure

flashed by.

"…Guh! Abort the attack! Everybody halt!"

The corner of mind in Yatori's brain dedicated to commanding always kept its cool, and repels the silly ideas of pushing into enemy ambushes regardless of the risk.

The cavalry unit stopped its advance. Noticing this the enemy also immediately slowed down and stopped, at the same time one after another new foes holding either crossbows or air-guns appeared from behind the rock.

"…So they set an ambush beforehand, the enemy was also quite well prepared."

Knowing that this plan even took consideration of the case being pursued, made Yatori feel admiration. If they followed them into the rocky area just then, the troops would have been shaken by the surprise, in that situation the flaw would have given the enemy the opportunity to deal a major blow to the main force.

But the reality was that Yatori's observation and quick decision had effects, her troops stopped before entering the enemy's effective shooting range. The reason the ambushing units showed themselves should be because they understood they were discovered.

At the foot of the Grand Arfatra Mountains range, the two forces stared at each other from long distances.

"…What can we do, platoon leader? Seeing the enemy numbers, if we charged while they attack, our force should also be prepared to face substantial sacrifices."

"It is so, Sergeant. Of course I would do it if the case required so but right now it's not that kind of

situation.”

After Yatori nodded in agreement to the adjutant, stared at the enemy group and shouted with all her strength:

“People of Shinaak! Why did you commit the atrocities of killing our comrades! Let me hear your excuses!”

This voice clearly reached the enemies stationed hundreds of meters away. After a little while, the enemy also replied. The surprising fact was the reply also came in a female voice.

“–The pain of your comrade’s death, do you feel it! Do you also feel it, it is painful!”

Compared to the not fluent impression unique to the Shinaak tribe’s dialect, the appearance of the opponent who said those words surprised Yatori even more. Although she couldn’t distinguish her face because of the distances, but without doubts she was a very petite young girl. Right now that young girl was shouting words representing the many Shinaak warriors present there.

“…Those who don’t care for their companions lives, aren’t those considered cold-blooded brutes on the mountains?!”

“You, you are the cold-blooded brutes! If it weren’t so, why did you take away our Hahashik?!”

“…. Hahashik? What are those?!”

“You have it at your side right now! You call them spirits! You took them away from us, if that’s not being cold-blooded brutes then what is?!”

Hearing her refer to something she absolutely had no recollection of made Yatori feel very confused. Even now she was ignorant regarding the repressing policy against the Shinaak tribe set by Lieutenant General Safida, the means employed and the matter regarding the confiscation of the spirits.

"Before that, you also forced us to accept various conditions! First you prohibited us to sell on the plains, then the military forcibly bought at dirty cheap prices our corn! So we could only buy few vegetables and fruits! The corn stock left was also not enough to pass the winter! The elderly, the children, they always, always starved to death!"

"…………….."

"Our companion who resorted to stealing as last resort were also killed by you one after another! You then even started to take away our fire and wind Hahashik! Taking away our food, killing our companions, even stealing our very important Hahashik–these kind of actions, if not brutes who would commit them! You tell me!"

Yatori gasped. Even her who was not familiar with the matter could feel the other party's profound hatred. At the same time, she realized the situation would not be solved with Major Taekk's death alone.

"…Then, make your request! From the tomorrow's military, what do you wish for?"

Yatori's hope of at least leaving a foot for negotiation was completely destroyed by the reply that came.

"Hn! We have no hope for you! Who would expect anything from brutes! …. We just wanted to resume it to the original way! We just wanted to return to the life before you forced us to go farther and farther north, return to the time we could go up the mountains and back to the plains freely, to those days that now makes people nostalgic!"

After the girl finished shouting, she extracted two thick Kukri knives from her sides and pointed them

to the sky. The polished blade that could even be used as a mirror reflected the bright and brilliant sunlight.

“We will beat you and get the Hahashik back, at the same time obtain the mountains and lowlands, returning them the original Shinaak world, the next step to archive our goal is the holy war! So I… chief of the Shinaak tribe, Nanak Dar, by this name I declare the beginning of the holy war!”

She waved down both swords at same time, and accurately aimed the tip at Yatori– She, the chief of Shinaak tribe, the youngest in history to reach such leading position, Nanak Dar raised her chest and with an imposing bearing made a declaration of war:

“Prepare yourselves! O devils of the plains!”

***

“–After such declaration, the enemy immediately retreated to the Grand Arfatra Mountains. The loss we suffered, starting from Major Yuskushiram Taekk, including the guards totals five men, all dead… These were the reports of Warrant Officer Yatorishino.”

In the command room, with the sunset leaking in from the open window, Lieutenant General Safida who finished listening to the subordinate’s report lightly nodded his head with an affirming sound while keeping staring out of the window.

Although he was initially greatly shocked from the news of his colleague being killed, but after calming down finishing listening till the end to the report, no matter how, he had restored his cool

head. Now he even seems to have enough margin to care whether his beard near the mouth is a little bit overgrown.

"Yusku passed away? It's regrettable to lose such talent."

These words of farewell harbored no emotion at all. Although to the Lieutenant General, losing an as talented aid as the Major was not something he shouldn't feel sorry about– but honestly, the daily pesky advices on everything just like his subordinate sister, irked him a lot.

"Those Shinaak mountain folks even dared to proclaim a holy war, they really do not understand the position they are in. Don't you think so?"

"Yes sir…"

"They were still likable when they were only barking, however they now even dared to claim they will bite, even I can't let those untamed stray dogs roam as they please."

The lieutenant general said so with a lacking tone. The underling behind did not notice the shallow smile that appeared on his mouth, and did not find out the dull tone used to mask the reckless excitement caused by the happy mood.

"It seems the time for mass extradition has come…it always pained me that the Grand Arfatra Mountains became the residence of stray dogs. So far I let them off on the friendly neighbor relationship we had, since they bit the hand that fed them, there are no other alternatives."

Hah…an uncontrollable laugh leaked from Lieutenant General's mouth, his heart truly was filled with gratitude.

In the extremely boring job of managing the northern region, repressing the Shinaak tribe was one of

lieutenant general's biggest entertainment. The tribes living in the northern mountains to him were nothing more than unclean and brutal human-like creatures, hunting them was just a stimulating and enjoyable game.

Having said so, legally even the Shinaak tribe was considered empire citizen, even him with his position of Lieutenant General could not openly regard them as hunting subjects. In addition to occasionally punishing those with thievery tendencies, what he could do was setting heavy taxes and taking away the spirits to abuse the Shinaak tribe. That was true till now.

–I did not expect the other party would take the initiative in creating the pretext…!

Lieutenant general Safida liked war. Because when ordering huge amounts of soldiers, he truly felt the authority of being the supreme commander of the northern region. His self-esteem, inflated to a curved shape could only be filled with gratification in such situations.

Not to mention that the fight with the Shinaak tribe was something he could only wish for. To be able of doing something he enjoyed while at the same time getting rid of those annoying people, of course he couldn't find a more wonderful recreational activity.

"I found the previous declaration of war a sign of rebellion from the whole tribe, our side must also act appropriately."

"Yes sir. Then we must have all the bases in the northern region rise their alert level…"

"That's too lenient. Gather soldiers from all bases and form a punitive force, the formation will be brigades."

Hearing the superior's orders, the subordinates could not help but doubt their own ears.

"…Sir you mean; our forces will take the initiative in attacking the Grand Arfatra Mountains?"

"What are you surprised for? You also know the northern region have small scale bases scattered all around because of the supply problems, if we continue like this we face the risk of the enemy taking them one after another, that's why we must turn that over by taking the initiative to attack."

Lieutenant general made this assertion confidently. A defensive battle didn't suit his character; the only way is to use huge amounts of soldiers to one-sidedly trample other ethnic groups–the heated stare he carried away gave this information.

"If our side gave an all-out attack, those guys would be too busy to defend to do anything else. We just need to act according the words of wisdom that says 'attack is the best form of defense'. Is there anything else?"

"No… None sir… I don't have any question… it's just, basically we still should hear the Major's opinion–"

Although the already ingrained habit made the officer say those words, however the figure that would make reasonable decisions was no longer in this world. Reminded of this fact, he could only remain silent.

Lieutenant general Safida took the subordinate's silence as agreement, happily hummed air from the nose. Then, like it suddenly came to his mind, added:

"–Right, do not report Yusku's death to Central yet."

"Huh? But sir…"

"Regardless of what, there will be sacrifices in a crusade. It's not too late to wait till the end of the

war and send the whole list together, that way is more natural.”

Lieutenant general Safida while using a randomly made up reason to convince his subordinate, at the same time was thinking– the moment they know of Yusku’s death, they will immediately dispatch the next overseer right? It is so annoying. But I will have to accept it sooner or later, but I still want to hold out as long as I can.

That’s right, at least until the punitive expedition is over. Until I have fully enjoyed this war that came from the heavens….

***

Once dinnertime came, in the canteen there was this subtle but noticeable difference in atmosphere from the usual. Even if it was oblivious no one was speaking loudly, however the chatter that was intentionally toned down was rampaging no stop. This was totally a symptom of the tension.

The members of the order of Knights were of no exception. After everybody globed down the food, all five were currently in a posture of intently listening to Yatori’s words.

“…. Holy war… Yatori, let me confirm this, did the opponent really say those exact words?”

After the first round of explanation, Ikta asked with frowning brows. Yatori nodded heavily.

“Yes, they indeed said so. Their resolution was quite firm.”

“Meaning they will do it even knowing such difference in combat power? We are really being hated huh.”

Matthew said with a bitter expression, Torway next to him kept holding the hands on his knees remaining silent.

“Although Major Taekk’s death was regrettable, but at present we had just lost to Kioka, right now national power is being consumed, thinking of having infighting within the empire is simply madness. What should be done is looking for ways to live in harmony.”

“I… I think so too, I can’t find any reason to wage war.”

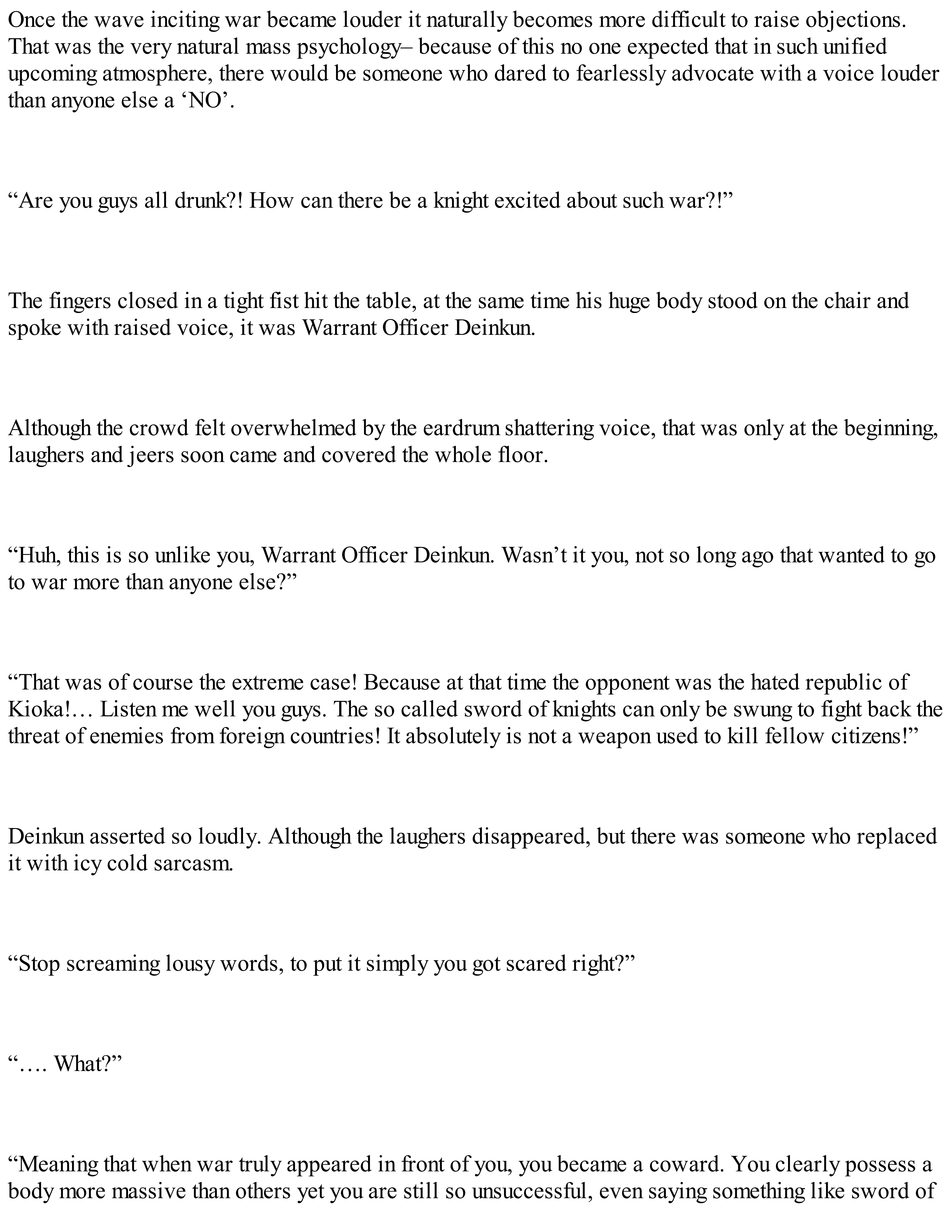
Haro concurred with her Highness Chamille’s opinion. But, with just a look at the surrounding you could find the people with opposite opinions who were clearly much more noticeable.

“Isn’t it good enough to have a direct confrontation? We should make use of this time and have those guys of the Shinaak tribe truly understand the situation they are in.”

“Those mountain folks dares to be so arrogant, I want to make them suffer the same fate as our dead companions!”

“We should revenge Major Taekk, the Major himself would wish so!”

Blood boiling comments came one after another. In addition, it was fueled by the fact that there were already victims, compared to the faction unwilling to go to war, the aggressive warmonger faction seems to get the blessing in such situation. There were no doubts, furthermore the simple concept of revenge war especially drove the soldiers’ sense of justice.


Once the wave inciting war became louder it naturally becomes more difficult to raise objections. That was the very natural mass psychology– because of this no one expected that in such unified upcoming atmosphere, there would be someone who dared to fearlessly advocate with a voice louder than anyone else a ‘NO’.

“Are you guys all drunk?! How can there be a knight excited about such war?!”

The fingers closed in a tight fist hit the table, at the same time his huge body stood on the chair and spoke with raised voice, it was Warrant Officer Deinkun.

Although the crowd felt overwhelmed by the eardrum shattering voice, that was only at the beginning, laughers and jeers soon came and covered the whole floor.

“Huh, this is so unlike you, Warrant Officer Deinkun. Wasn’t it you, not so long ago that wanted to go to war more than anyone else?”

“That was of course the extreme case! Because at that time the opponent was the hated republic of Kioka!… Listen me well you guys. The so called sword of knights can only be swung to fight back the threat of enemies from foreign countries! It absolutely is not a weapon used to kill fellow citizens!”

Deinkun asserted so loudly. Although the laughers disappeared, but there was someone who replaced it with icy cold sarcasm.

“Stop screaming lousy words, to put it simply you got scared right?”

“…. What?”

“Meaning that when war truly appeared in front of you, you became a coward. You clearly possess a body more massive than others yet you are still so unsuccessful, even saying something like sword of

knights, it truly makes me disgusted.”

“…. You want to insult my honor? If you dare so I want to hear you say it again!”

The muscular Agra stood up and stared at each other with Dekkun. Since both of them were comparable brawny men, once this escalates into a fighting incident, the canteen must be prepared to be completely trashed.

“What are you being noisy for! Keep quiet! Quiet!”

Only thanks to the intervention of the patrol officers that the big tragedy could be avoided. Agra harshly smashed his lips and sat down again, Deinkun also distorted away his line sight away from the other and sat down.

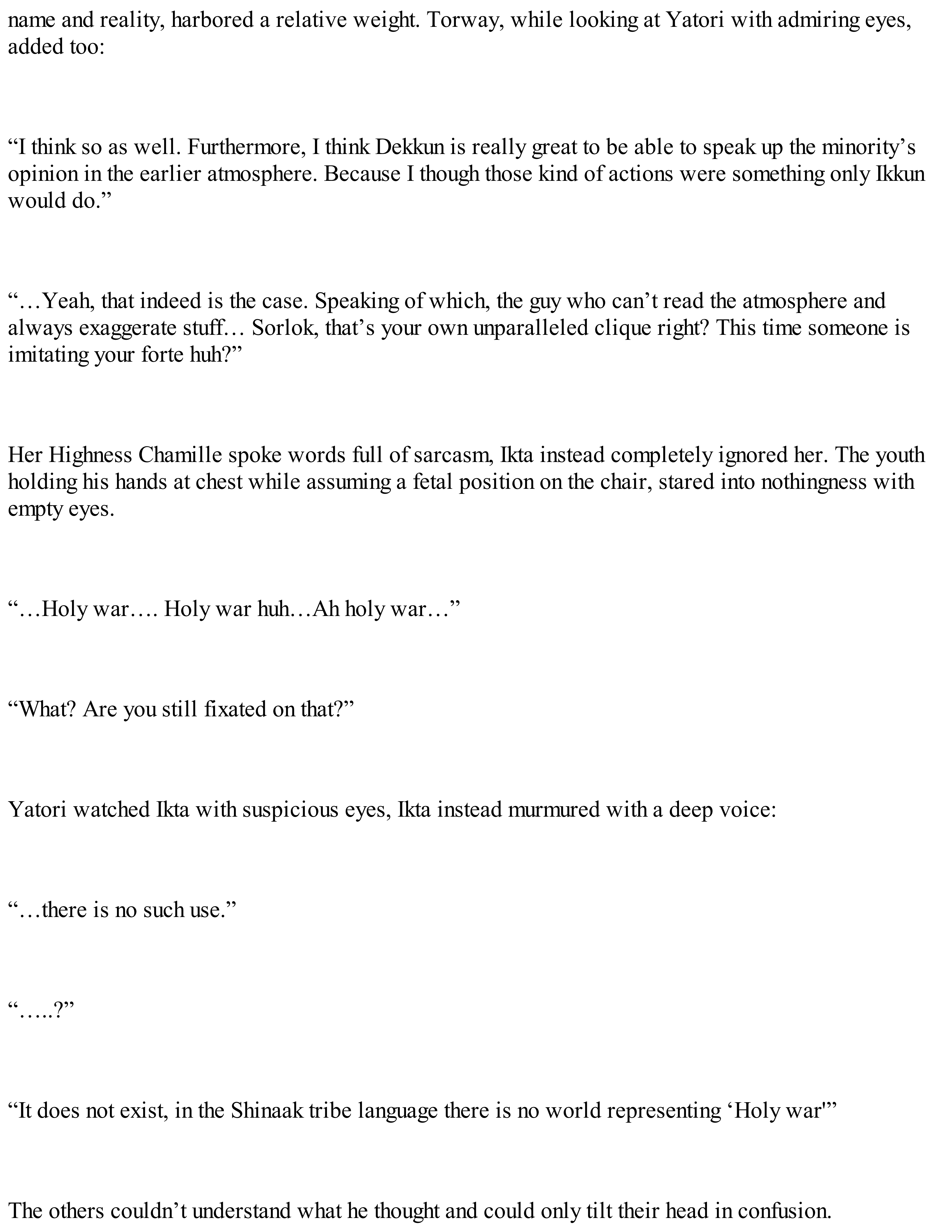
Under the repression exercised by the superior, the canteen was under high pressure and full of silence. As expected, the second after the officer returned to the corridor after inspecting the room, the conversation immediately revamped. Although there was a feeling the volume was toned down, but the number of conversations increased instead.

“…That was surprising, the Warrant Officer Hargunska full of fighting spirit decided to side with the non-war faction this time.”

Haro said so with a tad of intimacy, hearing that Yatori too revealed a faint smile.

“Thinking that was surprising is a faux pas of his assessment. As he himself stated, the so called knight is an existence to protect the country and its people from foreign countries’ invasion. Thus feeling resistance in having to act against the empire’s citizen would be the natural emotion.”

Different from the self-proclaimed knight Deinkun, Yatori’s words, the empire nominated knight, in



name and reality, harbored a relative weight. Torway, while looking at Yatori with admiring eyes, added too:

"I think so as well. Furthermore, I think Dekkun is really great to be able to speak up the minority's opinion in the earlier atmosphere. Because I though those kind of actions were something only Ikkun would do."

"…Yeah, that indeed is the case. Speaking of which, the guy who can't read the atmosphere and always exaggerate stuff… Sorlok, that's your own unparalleled clique right? This time someone is imitating your forte huh?"

Her Highness Chamille spoke words full of sarcasm, Ikta instead completely ignored her. The youth holding his hands at chest while assuming a fetal position on the chair, stared into nothingness with empty eyes.

"…Holy war…. Holy war huh…Ah holy war…"

"What? Are you still fixated on that?"

Yatori watched Ikta with suspicious eyes, Ikta instead murmured with a deep voice:

"…there is no such use."

"…..?"

"It does not exist, in the Shinaak tribe language there is no world representing 'Holy war'"

The others couldn't understand what he thought and could only tilt their head in confusion.

Ikta recovering his gaze started to explain:

“For the Shinaak tribe, warfare is simply competition for survival, in other words it’s just the most extreme display of the natural law of ‘the strong survive and the weak perish’. They do not affirm nor deny war, they just accept it as the plain truth of this world– it’s only they will never make the war ‘sacred’.”

“…You mean those guys from the Shinaak tribe do not require a righteous cause?”

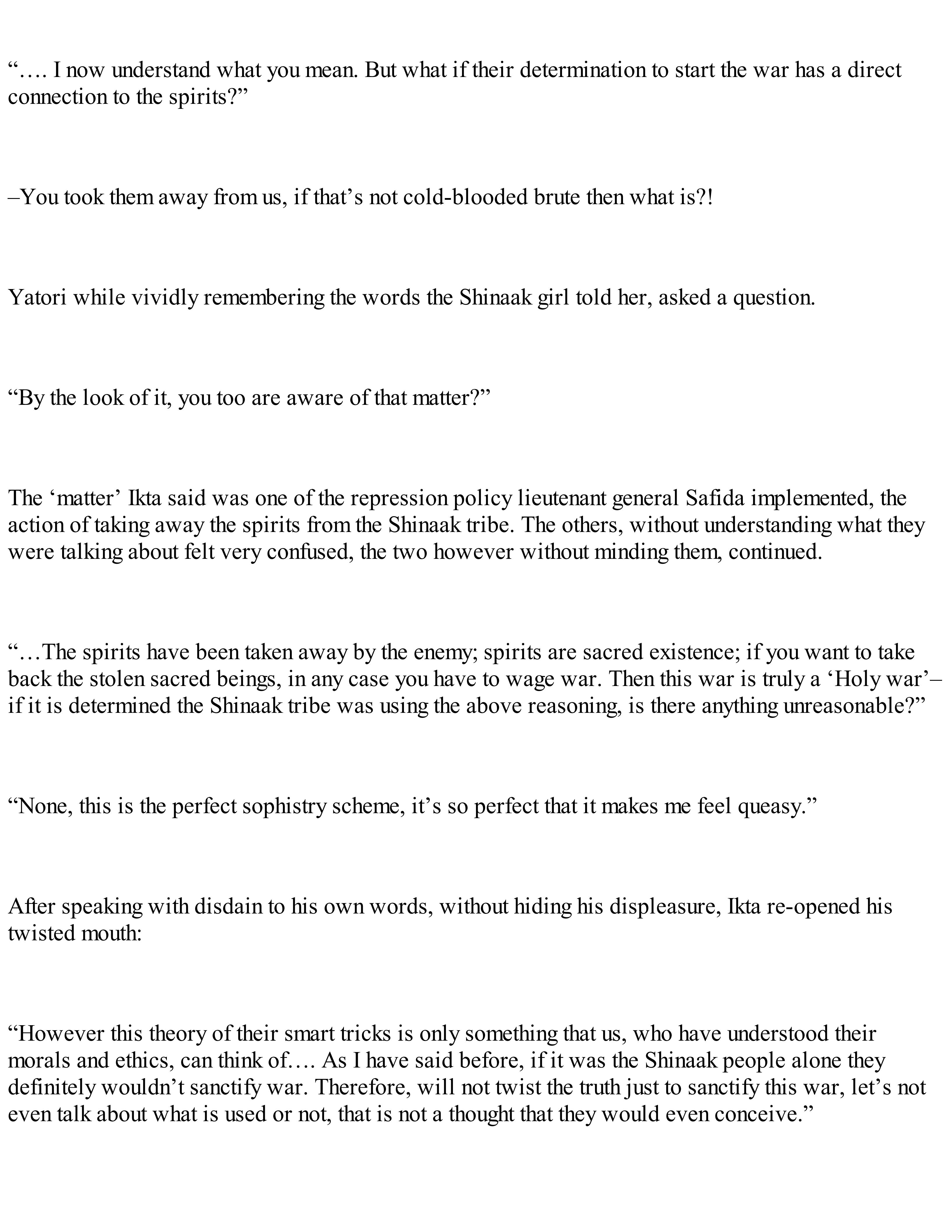
“Of course they do, the tribe’s prosperity and happiness is their righteousness. However, to them that is not some ‘sacred thing’. In another perspective the wealth obtained through warfare is nothing but property seized from others, and the reason is for your own beneficence. So that is just being unscrupulous for the sake of survival, it’s something completely opposite from sanctity.”

After reaching that point, Ikta paused and lightly stroked Kusu’s head in the waist bag.

“The subjects revered by the Shinaak people are different, they are Hahashik– the four great spirits in our pocket. The Shinaak people without exception consider these children who consider us human masters and devote themselves without condition, as ‘sacred beings’… we too understand it very well because when these children want to protect their human masters, they do so with no regard of their own status.”

In a world where the strong survive and the weak perish the spirits are the lone exception. In order to help the humans that are a completely different race, they not only put in all their efforts but also won’t require any form of return from the humans for their dedication. They wouldn’t say a word no matter how cruel their treatment was, the same even if they were shattered into pieces.

“There is only one thing in this world that the Shinaak people define as ‘sacred’– that is the existence of spirits who wholeheartedly devote to their masters. ‘Sacred’ and ‘spirits’ not only are interchangeable, any former non-interchangeable use of them are unlikely to have ever been recorded. Not to mention to mix it with a vulgar world such as ‘war’ is simply absurd.”



“…. I now understand what you mean. But what if their determination to start the war has a direct connection to the spirits?”

–You took them away from us, if that’s not cold-blooded brute then what is?!

Yatori while vividly remembering the words the Shinaak girl told her, asked a question.

“By the look of it, you too are aware of that matter?”

The ‘matter’ Ikta said was one of the repression policy lieutenant general Safida implemented, the action of taking away the spirits from the Shinaak tribe. The others, without understanding what they were talking about felt very confused, the two however without minding them, continued.

“…The spirits have been taken away by the enemy; spirits are sacred existence; if you want to take back the stolen sacred beings, in any case you have to wage war. Then this war is truly a ‘Holy war’– if it is determined the Shinaak tribe was using the above reasoning, is there anything unreasonable?”

“None, this is the perfect sophistry scheme, it’s so perfect that it makes me feel queasy.”

After speaking with disdain to his own words, without hiding his displeasure, Ikta re-opened his twisted mouth:

“However this theory of their smart tricks is only something that us, who have understood their morals and ethics, can think of…. As I have said before, if it was the Shinaak people alone they definitely wouldn’t sanctify war. Therefore, will not twist the truth just to sanctify this war, let’s not even talk about what is used or not, that is not a thought that they would even conceive.”

Ikta concluded and bitterly grinded his teeth. His appearance was like spitting out lava.

“Since it obliviously should have been so, they still used the word ‘Holy war’, then there is only one answer– there is someone else, a mastermind behind. Coming from outside, instilling the previously completed fallacy to the guys from Shinaak tribe.”

***

The night passed, and morning came.

Under the command of the supreme commander of the Northern Garrison Lieutenant General Safida it is issued a formal announcement, because of the murder of Major Taekk and Co a punitive force will be assembled.

By the time of mobilization, the troops were predicted to reach eighteen thousand people, becoming a military operation on a scale without precedence in the history of the northern region.

–Unrest at Katjvarna’s northern boundaries.

The war thus begun, covering a part of the Empire’s history with a thick layer of compatriots’ blood.

第三章

Alderamin on the Sky II

カトヴァーナ北域動乱

Chapter 3: Unrest at Katjvarna's Northern Boundaries

Beginning from the foothills of the Grand Arfatra Mountains, countless military boot footprints marked the ground.

Including PFC Kanna Temari who was at the front of the ranks, the imperial army marched forward, while continuing to increase the number of prints. They formed long continuous rows on the narrow mountain road, if there were someone who could observe the current situation from above, I'm afraid they wouldn't be able to differentiate them from ants' march.

"Huff…huff…huff…"

In a situation where the burden on the lower body continuously increased, Kanna desperately tried to maintain her breathing to a certain rhythm.

Having to march uphill while carrying heavy baggage, for Kanna who has long graduated from being a recruit this felt like an overly demanding task. They haven't even reached a fifth of the itinerary, moreover this was not something that would end with some easy relaxing when they reached the top. Their orders were to reach the top and crush the enemy.

–Defeating the enemy, shooting at human beings… Murdering lives.

Once she started thinking about it like that, adding to the physical weights, made Kanna really want to throw away the air gun strapped to her shoulder. Since she was at it, the backpack and uniform too… throw away everything beside her partner Tabb.

"Halt! Halt! Start the general break!"

The soldiers exhaled in relief after hearing the superior's roar. They began to sit down from the row

that finished the roll call and while they should be allowed to have conversation, not many voices were heard. Probably because everyone thought that if they were to waste energy here, their current actions may later result in a fatal injury.

“Air gunners, let your partners swallow the bullets first! Rapeseeds will be distributed to the incineration troops, you too let your spirits eat that!”

Expecting to encounter enemy soldiers, the superior ordered to assume an offensive formation while climbing up the mountain. Being an air gunner unit, Kanna took out ball-shaped bullets from her pocket and fed it to Tabb’s mouth. The bullet swallowed by the partner will automatically move to the air tunnel in the spirit’s body, furthermore the spirit itself will become a safety device, therefore there’s no need to worry about misfire.

While feeding the second bullet to Tabb, Kanna secretly observed her surroundings. The incineration troops got the rapeseeds containing large amount of oil, they made their partner eat those oil-rich tiny black particles, when the fire spirits spit out the residues, their body were already supplemented with fuel.

“…the war is getting closer.”

Seeing this spectacle, an emotion different from pure fatigue surfaced in Kanna’s chest. That is the fear of forgetting the atrocity of killing each other when you are just looking at your feet when marching forward.

“…this is not what I had wished for.”

***

Till the moment she stepped onto the escort wagon, her highness Chamille didn't stop complaining to the members of the order of knights.

The carriage ferrying the nobles fleeing the flames of war left to the south, the guard duty for the journey was left in charge to a battalion. While the uneasiness still remained due the previous instance of betrayal from personal guards, however considering the geographical characteristics of the northern region, there shouldn't be many with enough backbone to revolt against the royalties — this optimism was fairly rational.

"So they left… honestly I am relieved. Although the princess said otherwise, but since the war has already begun, a noble such as the princess shouldn't keep staying on the frontlines."

Among the members of order of knights who came to see her off, no one objected to Haro's thought.

The fort they were moving to was in close proximity to the Grand Arfatra Mountains, which was where the Shinaak tribe lived. If the enemy were to obtain info regarding the princess' presence, the chances of her being targeted would be really high.

"…. let's first not talk about the escort operation itself…moving to the new post in the base on the southern tip of the northern region itself is…."

A skeptical expression emerged on Matthew's face, it was because Lieutenant General Safida did not let her Highness the Princess go back to Central, instead he just evacuated her to the southern part of the northern region. While she would be far from the battlefield thus the risk was not high, however for it should have been a 'Conclusion reached taking the safety of the royalty as first priority', there is no doubt this choice would come hard to understand to others.

"From the princess' current standpoint, returning to Central isn't necessarily the safest… but even if we were not to consider this, we should still think that behind this matter of not wanting to return the

princess is the desire of forestalling interference from the Lieutenant Generals in central."

Torway shared his thoughts–Even if he were to command as Lieutenant General, it still wouldn't shut the mouth of a royalty. There was intelligence in the northern base that would be really bad if it was gotten a hold of by the princess who returned to Central, thus she was to be left in the northern region. Having this kind of thoughts was a very natural reaction, Yatori too nodded in agreement.

"The responsibility of safeguarding the local security on all four sides of the Empire is totally left respectively to the Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern garrison. Thus Lieutenant General Safida's particularly fervent involvement in the Shinaak Tribe's armed rebellion was also inevitable in such case…. Having said that, since he mobilized the troops to this extent on such big scale, he should have first reported to central and asked for instructions."

"I can hardly believe he would have honestly followed those steps. Since just the day after the incident, he already informed the whole army to marshal a punitive force to subjugate the Shinaak tribe, this totally shows how Lieutenant General is grandstanding."

Ikta didn't hide his unhappy mood. Because he was not joking like he usually would have, it made Matthew feel extremely alarmed.

"…. Bu… But, no matter how the war will evolve, in the end we still would be maintain our current standby status right? Even if coming to this new post in the northern region was to let us accumulate practical experience, but this kind of situation was not expected. Even Lieutenant General Safida wouldn't send the precious High Grade Military Officer cadets to the dangerous frontlines right?"

"This is a very legitimate claim, my buddy Matthew… but it's really sad, the so called common sense is only meaningful to those who understands common sense, right now we can only pray Lieutenant General is one of these people."

"…That's true, especially now that Major Taekk has passed away."



Although they spoke those words, both Ikta and Yatori showed no sign of expectation. Even Torway who always smoothed things over is now sticking to a heavy silence.

While thinking he should make mental preparations as soon as possible, Matthew looked over to the peak of the Grand Arfatra Mountains surrounded by thick clouds. Five seconds after him, Haro too reached the same conclusion.

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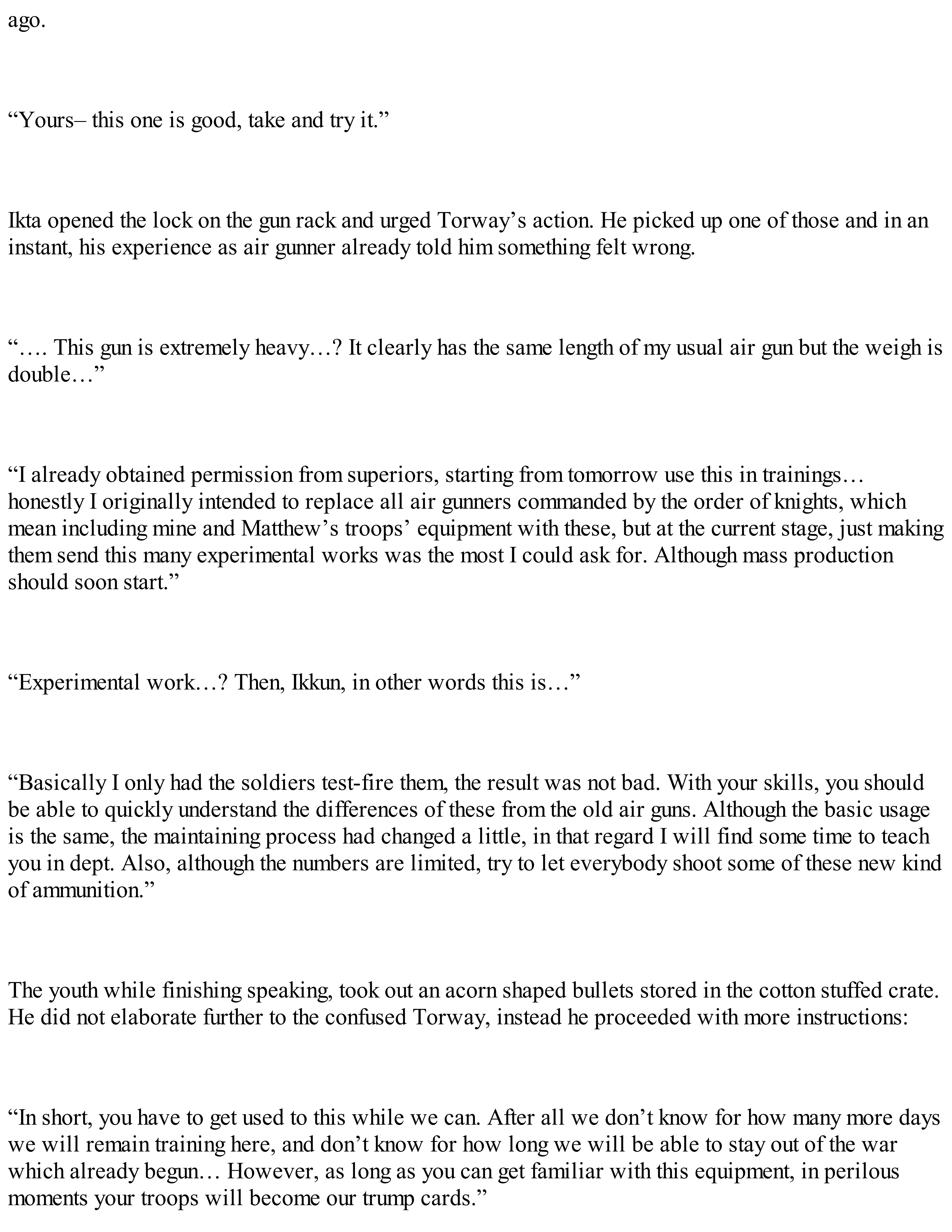
That evening, after learning that a certain cargo coming from central was delivered here, Ikta called Torway over to the outdoor shooting training field after midnight.

He set a row of targets tens of meters away from the firing position, at night it looked like dark figure standing side by side. Hard to believe legends were also circulating among the soldiers here because of these sinister atmospheres.

“What’s the matter Ikkun. Is there something here…?”

Ikta didn’t answer Torway’s question, he just kept quietly walking forward, shortly after, they arrived at the corner of the shooting ground, there he uncovered the drapes hiding a certain object with substantial longitudinal width.

The thing that appeared from under the cloth was a gun rack with the attached lock, and the air guns that hang there. The total number was around forty, every single of them shone with the light of new metals, making people understand at first glance they were brand new goods manufactured not long



ago.

“Yours– this one is good, take and try it.”

Ikta opened the lock on the gun rack and urged Torway’s action. He picked up one of those and in an instant, his experience as air gunner already told him something felt wrong.

“…. This gun is extremely heavy…? It clearly has the same length of my usual air gun but the weigh is double…”

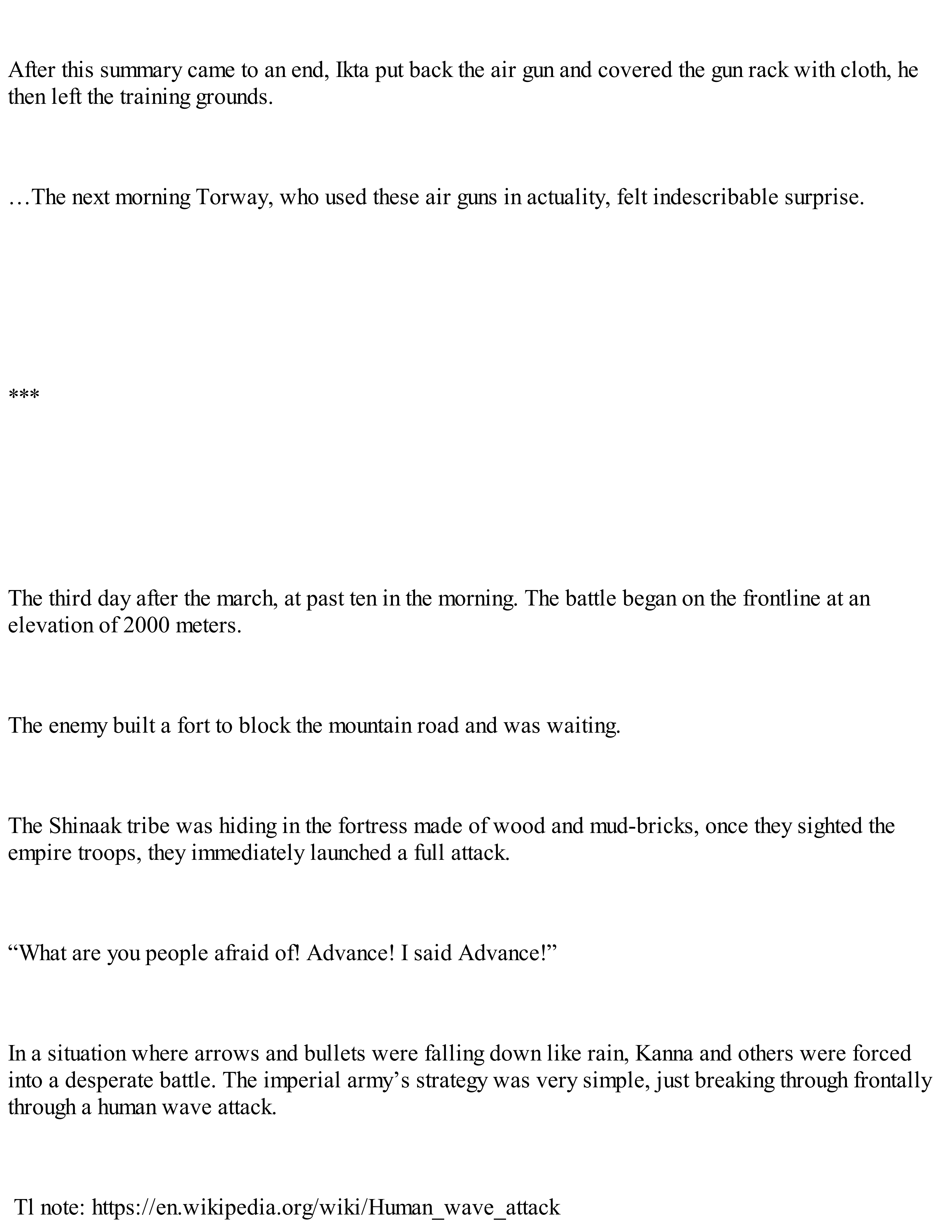
“I already obtained permission from superiors, starting from tomorrow use this in trainings… honestly I originally intended to replace all air gunners commanded by the order of knights, which mean including mine and Matthew’s troops’ equipment with these, but at the current stage, just making them send this many experimental works was the most I could ask for. Although mass production should soon start.”

“Experimental work…? Then, Ikkun, in other words this is…”

“Basically I only had the soldiers test-fire them, the result was not bad. With your skills, you should be able to quickly understand the differences of these from the old air guns. Although the basic usage is the same, the maintaining process had changed a little, in that regard I will find some time to teach you in dept. Also, although the numbers are limited, try to let everybody shoot some of these new kind of ammunition.”

The youth while finishing speaking, took out an acorn shaped bullets stored in the cotton stuffed crate. He did not elaborate further to the confused Torway, instead he proceeded with more instructions:

“In short, you have to get used to this while we can. After all we don’t know for how many more days we will remain training here, and don’t know for how long we will be able to stay out of the war which already begun… However, as long as you can get familiar with this equipment, in perilous moments your troops will become our trump cards.”



After this summary came to an end, Ikta put back the air gun and covered the gun rack with cloth, he then left the training grounds.

…The next morning Torway, who used these air guns in actuality, felt indescribable surprise.

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The third day after the march, at past ten in the morning. The battle began on the frontline at an elevation of 2000 meters.

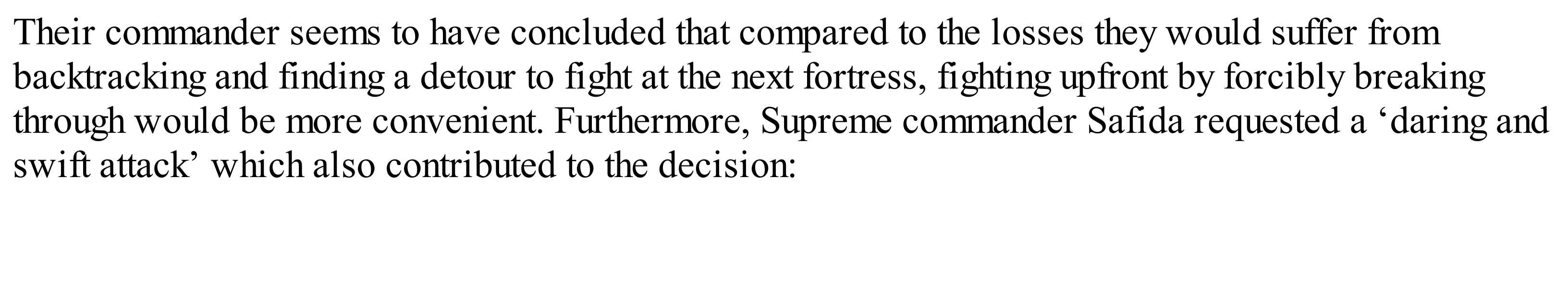
The enemy built a fort to block the mountain road and was waiting.

The Shinaak tribe was hiding in the fortress made of wood and mud-bricks, once they sighted the empire troops, they immediately launched a full attack.

“What are you people afraid of! Advance! I said Advance!”

In a situation where arrows and bullets were falling down like rain, Kanna and others were forced into a desperate battle. The imperial army’s strategy was very simple, just breaking through frontally through a human wave attack.

Tl note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_wave_attack


Their commander seems to have concluded that compared to the losses they would suffer from backtracking and finding a detour to fight at the next fortress, fighting upfront by forcibly breaking through would be more convenient. Furthermore, Supreme commander Safida requested a ‘daring and swift attack’ which also contributed to the decision:

“This is definitely impossible–”

Kanna murmured with trembling voice three minutes after the fighting begun…. No matter the era, it was always the soldiers on the frontline who would first find out the mistakes a superior make when estimating the lives cost. This time Kanna was also included in those people.

A fist sized shell came flying sending the male soldiers around Kanna flying. A piece of flesh is missing from the leg directly hit by the artillery revealing the broken bones, but it did not possess the power to grant immediate death to those hit. This was in fact a very cruel tactic. The battlefield was filled with panicked and painful cries from companions who were unable to move because of injuries.

“Do not flinch! That would be falling for the enemy’s strategy! Act like soldiers and bravely challenge the enemy!”

Even commanders were inciting soldiers like this, but the loss the imperial army suffered of course wasn’t due to a lack of morale. To the eyes of Kanna, who was pushed to the frontline, the true reason could be said to be understood at a glance.

“I said this was impossible……! Don’t they see how many wind mortars the enemy has set up on the ramp?!”

Just looking up, in front of them was a whole row of cannon muzzles. The consecutive shells shot from the muzzle sent the soldiers flying, extreme impacts had them bounce and roll off the slopes. In dangerous situations a single shell could hit four to five people.

Just as Kanna had seen through, Shinaak tribe warriors' use of wind mortars had reached almost maximum efficiency. Short range, insufficient power, difficult handling– these shortcoming were well known, but there was in fact a unique method of utilizing them that makes up all of these.

That was to line them up on high places and after setting the muzzle beforehand, engage the enemy who wants to climb up the slope. That alone would make the mortars perfect. First by relying on the aid gravity gives, it can increase its firing range, the power would of course increase too; then setting the muzzle to an angle that's is parallel to the slope, it makes 'Aiming and firing at the enemy' so easy that it's surprising.

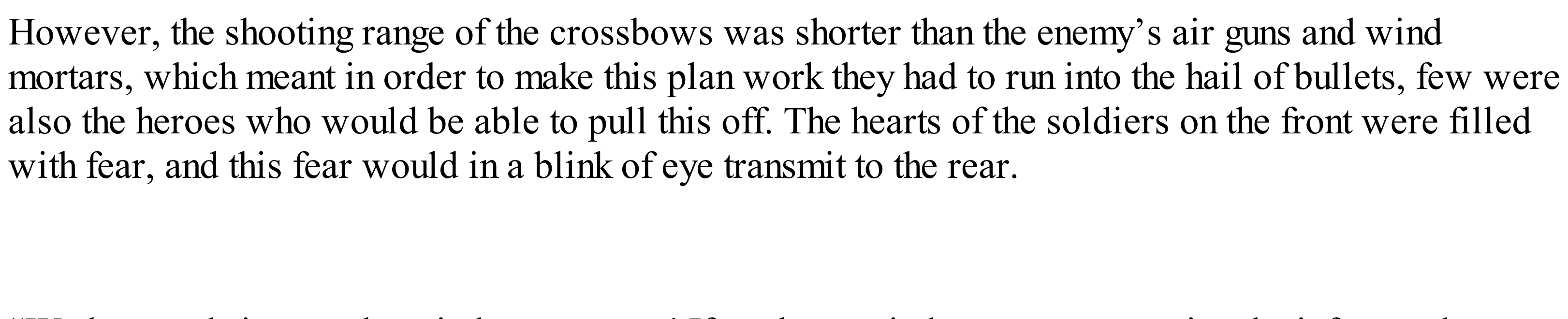
When firing on flat grounds, normally the shells had to be fired at an upward oblique angle, and hit the enemy after travelling a curved arc. Thus you could archieve the longest firing range, but on the other side it was also extremely hard to hit the enemy with accuracy. The reason was because in that situation the soldiers had to at same time aim horizontally at the enemy and also calculate the vertical angle.

However, if you were meeting the enemy's assault from a slope, this would suddenly become easy. Because if you had aligned the muzzle parallel to the angle of the slope, considering how the enemy could only have attacked, crawling up the slope, then there would have been no need to re-adjust the angle. Furthermore, the shells could in one shot get rid of all enemies in a line.

As a further step if you could prepare wind mortars in enough numbers to fill longitudinally the mountain road that formed the slope, then the groundwork would be perfect. The defending side did not even need to aim, they just had to keep firing in order to defeat the majority of the enemy, as for the few who managed to slip thorough, the air guns and crossbows would do the job.

Kanna's current situation was really similar to this theory. Even if they wanted to use the huge difference in numbers to overwhelm the enemy, but short story, the enemy's current shelling was too intense, of course there wouldn't be many brave enough to dare a frontal assault rushing up this slope of death.

On the other hand, after considering the fortress made by wood and mud-brick should be susceptible to fires, the incendiary corps tried to shoot burning arrows toward the enemy's field.


However, the shooting range of the crossbows was shorter than the enemy's air guns and wind mortars, which meant in order to make this plan work they had to run into the hail of bullets, few were also the heroes who would be able to pull this off. The hearts of the soldiers on the front were filled with fear, and this fear would in a blink of eye transmit to the rear.

"We have to bring out the wind mortars too! If we have wind mortars supporting the infantry, then we would be fighting under the same circumstances!"

This was shouted by the commander who had lost his patience, but of course this order was also a mistake. With the current situation, unless they fix the issue of the two side being at different altitude, the conditions would definitely not be the same. The initial decision to force a frontal assault to break through had already signed the imperial army would fight an unfavorable battle.

However, albeit thinking it as a mistake, orders were orders, and soldiers had to obey. Granted that Kanna wasn't part of artillery units, but using wind mortars required multiple wind spirits, which is why together with the comrades in the same squad she had the duty to bring her partner Tabb to the artillery platform.

"We need to go, follow me and don't fall behind!"

"…Uuh… okay! Let's go! Private Yazan, you too get up!"

Kanna finally suppressed the fear in her heart, grabbed the hand of the only junior who was her squad and rushed out from behind the rock. The air gunner a year younger than her reluctantly followed, but maybe because he was too scared and was running with a staggering pace, in the mere ten meters they ran, he almost fell three times.

"Get your act together! Okay, now put your partner in this battery! Do you still remember how to do it?"

"Ah…ah…ah…"

” I understand… your brain went blank huh… anyway copy my actions!”

Kanna while taking care of the junior who was fundamentally useless, put the wind spirit Tabb in the connection port of the wind mortar. She aligned the air tunnel in Tabb’s body to the nozzle and tightly wrapped the fixing belt. However, when she was just about to extend her hand to do the job for Private Yazan who was being slow, suddenly a chill ran back her spine– with the corner of her eye she saw the enemy’s muzzle was aimed right at them.

“This is bad…! Squad leader! This place is also being targeted!”

Kanna, while speaking, loosened the fixing equipment with actions as if to break the belt and picked Tabb up. She then ran to cover while dragging Private Yazan– although he was being too slow fixing the wind spirit, in this case it became a stroke of luck.

A second later, the shell that came flying hit the mortar barrel, shattering the wind mortar. However, Kanna and the companions from the same squad managed to take cover behind a rock in the nick of time.

Hu~ the earlier breathless Kanna started inhaling again, right then the squad leader spoke to her:

“PFC Kanna, it’s all thanks to you noticing the earlier attack that we managed to avoid the same fate as that worn-out mortar.”

“Ha…Haha…you’re welcome… it would be a great help if the enemy’s wind mortar was a little more worn-out….”

Although Kanna’s answer held no particular meaning, what was amazing was, from then on the enemy’s shelling began to decline. The shelling density fell, air gun shootings also became sporadic, finally the battlefield became completely silent.



The commander was left in wonder as he couldn't figure out the reason the enemy would loosen up on attacks in such moment, but after thinking for a short while he found a plausible reason and made a heartfelt cheer.

"Great, those guys ran out of ammunitions! You guys, quickly charge!"

The soldiers advanced forward taking the superior's worlds with a grain of salt but in the end they truly did not encounter resistance. Or it should be said the fortress was left empty, there were totally no living being left inside.

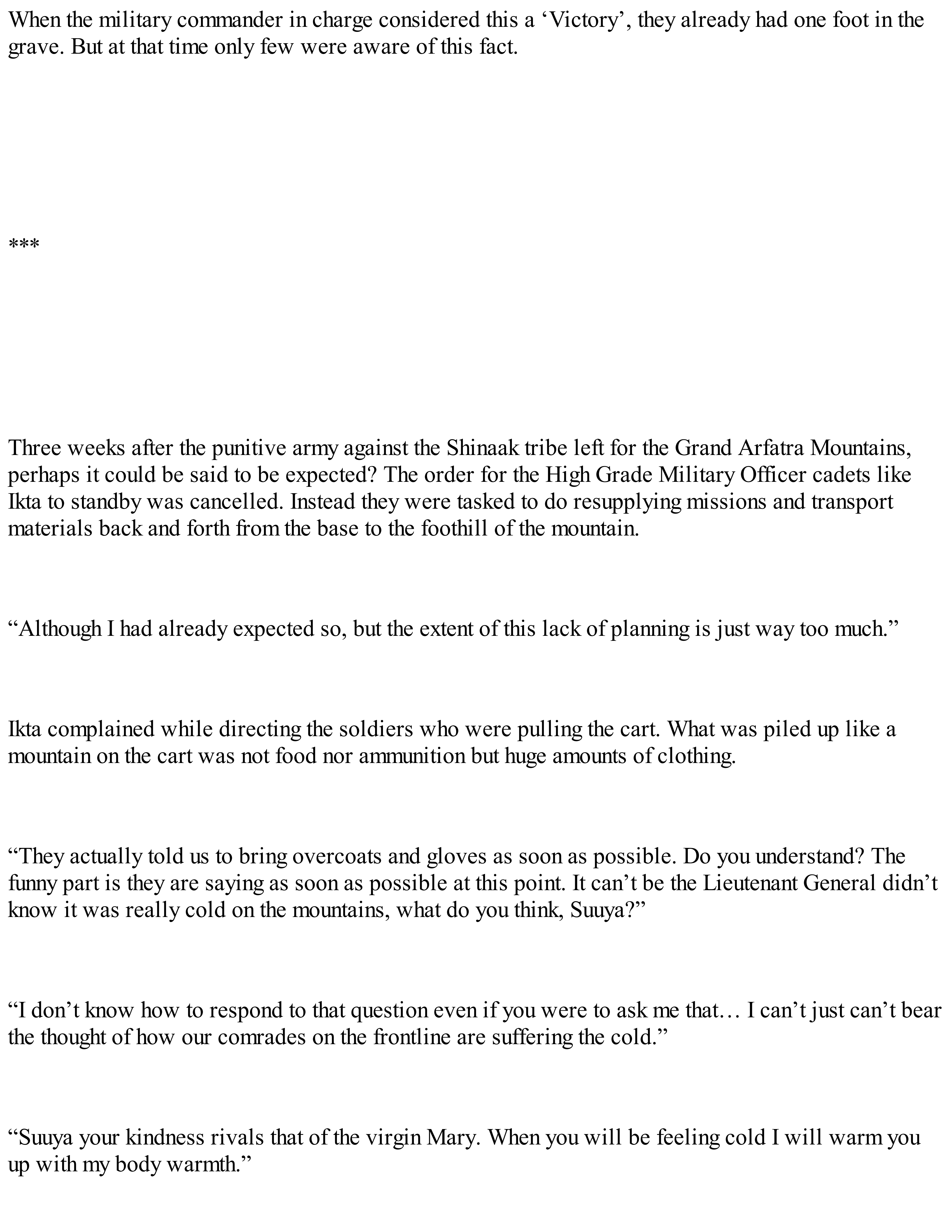
The enemy must have considered the moment they exhausted ammunitions was the right time to close the curtains on the battle so decided to retreat. The commander, not resigning as he didn't get the chance to retaliate the same treatment they were subjected to, fiercely smacked his lips– these barbarians sure are quick in running away.

"Send out the pursuing units! The enemy should still be nearby!"

Right after the battle, without even getting the time to catch a breath, the pursuing units received a new order to sortie…. however, the enemies were scattered in all directions because of the advantage in geographical knowledge unique to local residents they had which made the soldier's effort end in vain, in the end the pursuing concluded with the scenario of them not capturing any of the fugitives.

"They make ire me so much…! …. Forget it, after all we obtained victory in the first battle! This is what matters!"

Compared to the enemy who virtually got almost no losses at all, the imperial army suffered one hundred twenty-four casualties, the number of injured was ten times greater. They had no enemy prisoner, and of course got no information regarding the enemy camp.


When the military commander in charge considered this a ‘Victory’, they already had one foot in the grave. But at that time only few were aware of this fact.

***

Three weeks after the punitive army against the Shinaak tribe left for the Grand Arfatra Mountains, perhaps it could be said to be expected? The order for the High Grade Military Officer cadets like Ikta to standby was cancelled. Instead they were tasked to do resupplying missions and transport materials back and forth from the base to the foothill of the mountain.

“Although I had already expected so, but the extent of this lack of planning is just way too much.”

Ikta complained while directing the soldiers who were pulling the cart. What was piled up like a mountain on the cart was not food nor ammunition but huge amounts of clothing.

“They actually told us to bring overcoats and gloves as soon as possible. Do you understand? The funny part is they are saying as soon as possible at this point. It can’t be the Lieutenant General didn’t know it was really cold on the mountains, what do you think, Suuya?”

“I don’t know how to respond to that question even if you were to ask me that… I can’t just can’t bear the thought of how our comrades on the frontline are suffering the cold.”

“Suuya your kindness rivals that of the virgin Mary. When you will be feeling cold I will warm you up with my body warmth.”

“In that situation please make a fire– well we have arrived.”

Suuya while dealing with the frivolous superior, told the troops they had reached the destination. At the foothill of the Grand Arfatra Mountains was established an supply relay station in addition to the multiple soldier camps, there was even a huge tent erected for the commander. After noticing the delivery of the goods, soldiers immediately came to check on the contents.

“Yeah, the third illumination training platoon has now arrived. The content of the cargo are large amounts of coats and gloves.”

“You have worked hard Warrant Officer. I will immediately confirm the contents.”

Ikta left alone the soldier who neatly started the checking and started to look around his surroundings. He immediately noticed something was out of place– The number of units waiting around because their superior was absent was incredibly high.

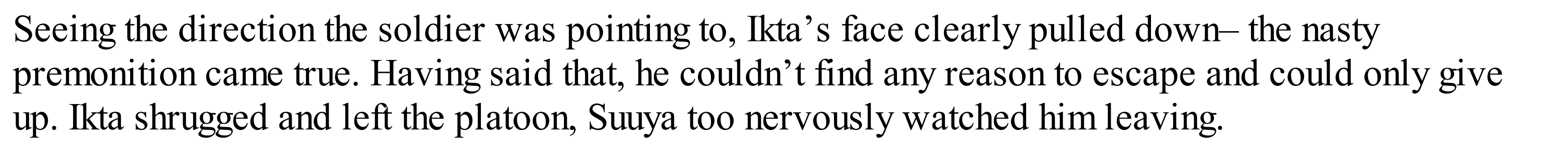
The feeling of something being out of place turned in an instant into nasty premonitions, making him feel like it would be best if he left as soon as possible– after reasoning this, Ikta turned to leave but the soldier who finished the checking hurriedly stopped him.

“I am terribly sorry, there is another matter….”

“…Isn’t the checking already over?”

“It’s not that, please go in that tent. The superior has called for you.”

Tl note: it's hard to render in English but the soldier has been speaking in an extremely polite manner



Seeing the direction the soldier was pointing to, Ikta's face clearly pulled down– the nasty premonition came true. Having said that, he couldn't find any reason to escape and could only give up. Ikta shrugged and left the platoon, Suuya too nervously watched him leaving.

"Excuse me… Hn… Whoa…"

Just lifting the cloth covering the tent's entrance made Ikta speak those words. The reason, inside the tent he though could only fit four to five people, right now was crammed with more than ten officers sitting side by side. Furthermore, they were all faces he knows, the other three members of order of knights, excluding Haro, were also present.

Tl note: In the original it literary said 'open the door to the tent' but I though lifting cloth was more appropriate since we are talking about tents.

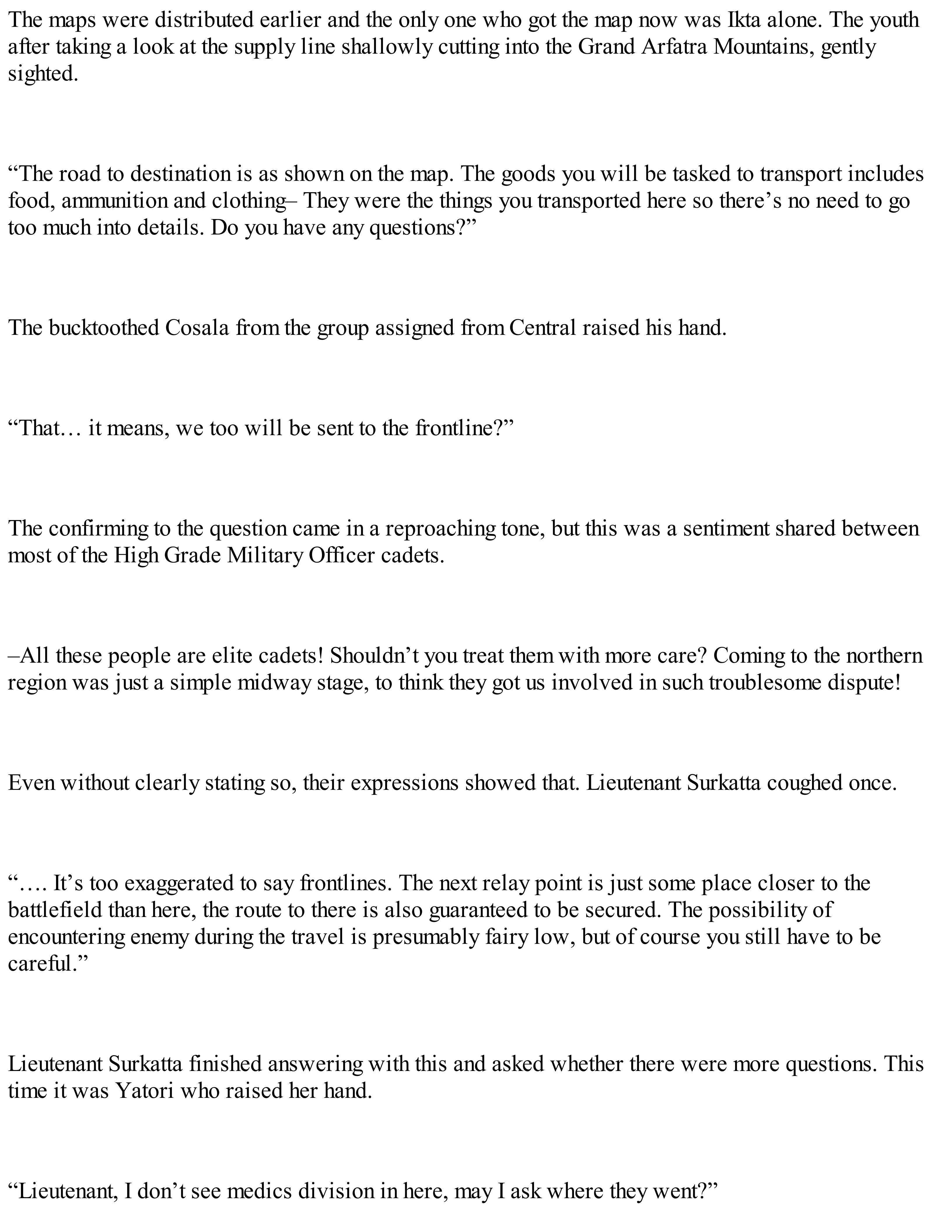
"You are Warrant Officer Ikta Sorlok right? Sit down over there."

Hearing the order from someone wearing a Lieutenant class badge, Ikta sat down after reaching the corner of the tent. Confirming all seats were now occupied, the male officer begun to talk about the topic.

"I am late in presentation; I am Lieutenant Amuuse Surkatta. I will be taking responsibility for managing your troops instead of Lieutenant Sazaruf who was dispatched the frontlines. Therefore, the order I am about to give is one from your direct superior, you have to remember this well."

Since Lieutenant Sazaruf who was the instructor guiding the cadets was enlisted in the first wave of the punitive army and sent to the frontlines, Ikta and others who were sent from Central were left in a pending standby position, it was finally decided they would go under this Lieutenant Surkatta.

"Although you were already tasked to transport materials from the base, the next order is to transport materials from here to the next relay station. First take a look at the map previously distributed."


The maps were distributed earlier and the only one who got the map now was Ikta alone. The youth after taking a look at the supply line shallowly cutting into the Grand Arfatra Mountains, gently sighted.

“The road to destination is as shown on the map. The goods you will be tasked to transport includes food, ammunition and clothing– They were the things you transported here so there’s no need to go too much into details. Do you have any questions?”

The bucktoothed Cosala from the group assigned from Central raised his hand.

“That… it means, we too will be sent to the frontline?”

The confirming to the question came in a reproaching tone, but this was a sentiment shared between most of the High Grade Military Officer cadets.

–All these people are elite cadets! Shouldn’t you treat them with more care? Coming to the northern region was just a simple midway stage, to think they got us involved in such troublesome dispute!

Even without clearly stating so, their expressions showed that. Lieutenant Surkatta coughed once.

“…. It’s too exaggerated to say frontlines. The next relay point is just some place closer to the battlefield than here, the route to there is also guaranteed to be secured. The possibility of encountering enemy during the travel is presumably fairy low, but of course you still have to be careful.”

Lieutenant Surkatta finished answering with this and asked whether there were more questions. This time it was Yatori who raised her hand.

“Lieutenant, I don’t see medics division in here, may I ask where they went?”

This question was sprung from Haro’s absence. The Lieutenant answered this promptly too:

“They were sent to destination before you because we wanted to set up a field hospital as soon as possible.”

Yatori after nodding lowered her hand, however commotion spread among the others. Because from Lieutenant Surkatta’s words emerged the reality that injured unceasingly increased on the frontline. The atmosphere in the tent became heavier.

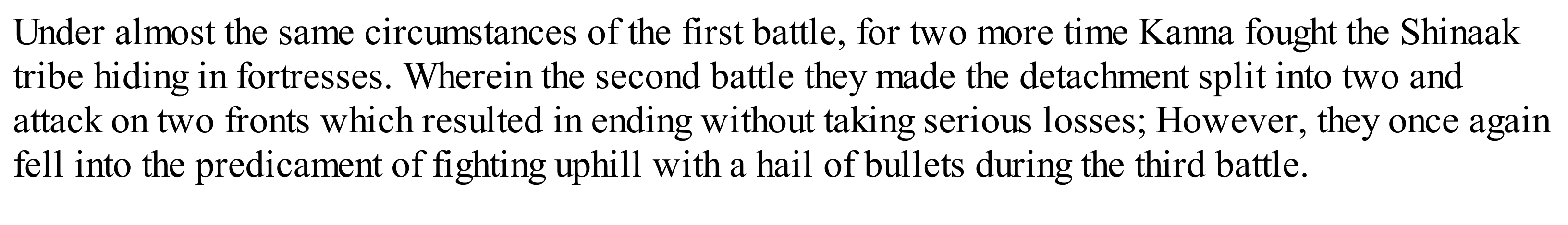
“Are there more questions? …if there aren’t I will now organize the transporting units into troops, it obliviously is my job to integrate the units of all present and unify into a central command. Good, as instructed go outside and mobilize the troops.”

The young officers asked to leave all harbored bitter expressions and their footsteps were especially heavy.

“…They actually pushed us out so quickly. Really, the frontline looks pretty miserable.”

Ikta whispered while slowly walking at the rearmost of the group.

***


Under almost the same circumstances of the first battle, for two more time Kanna fought the Shinaak tribe hiding in fortresses. Wherein the second battle they made the detachment split into two and attack on two fronts which resulted in ending without taking serious losses; However, they once again fell into the predicament of fighting uphill with a hail of bullets during the third battle.

"…Huff…. huff…. huff…. huff…."

Kanna dragged along her exhausted body that finally made it past the breakthrough which lasted half a day, in order to further advance in the invasion, they continued mountaineering. It was impossible to recover the stamina with just one hour of general resting, adding in the worsening weather, the soldier's morale fell sharply.

–I did not expect my body was so tenacious.

Remaining unscathed after three battles, Kanna herself was taken aback. Maybe she was born to be on the battlefield? The fear in her heart that made her shrink during the first battle, was already half gone by the second, when the third battle came, she even understood how to not easily die.

"Well Yazan, you have to more consciously adjust your breathing. Inhale twice and exhale once, inhale~inhale~exhale~ this way. Because if you keep gasping for air you will feel even more tired."

"Ye-Yes… I'm really sorry, Lance Corporal Kanna…."

Tl note: Lance corporal is a rank above PFC and one below corporal.

The recruit, Private Yazan, managed to keep his life thanks to the many helps from her. Although Kanna inadvertently seemed to have become the one responsible for the care of Yazan, she herself was not bothered by it. After all she couldn't just throw away this junior who was seemingly helpless, then the idea of simply take care of him from the beginning felt easier.

"You don't need to apologize. While you indeed are dragging me down, however I also know you are

truly putting all your efforts.”

Besides that, the reason to caring for another diverted Kanna from her thoughts. While fighting, people would naturally be terrified, even during the period they were marching people would be pestered by anxiety attacks. Maybe I won’t survive next time, maybe the enemy will jump out from behind the rock over there, and so on…

Being called ‘Lance corporal’ she was unaccustomed to, made Kanna recall the comrades in her squad who left the march because of the wounds they suffered. She worried about whether him, who had been shot in the abdomen, would be eligible to go get treatment in the rear.

On the other hand, precisely because that person left, the sentence ‘the one to take over my position will be Kanna Temari’ made Kanna a nominal Lance corporal. The thought of him naming herself to take over, increase her sense of responsibility even more.

“Halt! …. Spotted a fortress ahead!”

The soldiers in front warned. Hearing the word fortress, Kanna, who thought they had to fight for another time an enemy hiding inside, felt very frustrated, however the report of the scout who had gone to investigate betrayed her expectation.

“The presence of enemies could not be confirmed! There is nobody inside!”

The commander pondered for a moment by putting his hand on his chin which was pitch black because of the unshaven beard.

“We are at high ground, the position is good too… Very well let’s make use of this fort! The two platoon behind, follow me!”

Kanna and others who were called, after going to the observation point found there truly was an abandoned fortress. In the particularly prominent rocks in the surrounding seems to be dug trenches, it even had the space to station more than one hundred soldiers.

“Here is the most suitable place to engage the enemy… good, let’s set up camp in here. But we can’t station the whole company here. Two platoons of air gunners, one platoon of illumination, and one platoon of medics should be enough.”

By the orders of the commander, the troops in front of the army started to be assigned to the camp. The unit Kanna was in was also included, to tell the truth it made Kanna sigh in relief. Because this way she didn’t have to climb anymore.

“But, there seems….”

After observing the surrounding scenery from the scouting post, Kanna felt in her heart was an uneasiness she couldn’t grasp the gist of. Why was that? She thought. Here the field of view was great, almost 360°, regardless of which side the enemy would attack, they would be spotted immediately. And to be in a defensive position, the advantages of high ground was so oblivious it doesn’t even need to be explained.

“I will lead the remaining troops and continue marching. Without further instructions, you have to defend this fort with your lives!”

“”””””Yes,Sir ！ ””””””

Kanna and others replied to the order with a conditioned like reflex response…however at this time, whether it was the one who gave the order nor those who received the order, nobody understood… the true intentions of the enemy who abandoned the fortress knowingly that it would be taken. And more importantly they didn’t understand the limitless burden an order like ‘with your lives’ carried.

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Ikta and team departed from the foothill of the mountain toward the next supply relay station. However, after reaching there with the carriage, they found another development waiting for them.

"Oya~ the old transport troops were all dispatched. So sorry to ask this but can you transport this to the next relay station deeper in?"

"I heard the next front is lacking in blankets, we are really busy with our tasks to you guys deliver it in our stead."

"These are the required supply of bullets and rapeseeds. Don't show an aloof attitude because you guys are elites, you should just all work!"

Just like that they suffered the same fate each time they delivered the goods. Lieutenant Surkatta's order for the cadets to transport goods set the perfect precedent, the others thought 'Well, if it's like that then we too should make use of them' and started dictating them around.

Even the right to command the cadets had transferred from Lieutenant Surkatta to the other commanders. Among the officers in the northern region, many hated the High Grade Military Officer cadets, therefore the 'guest' treatment they had before changed in a blink of eye, they fell down to the position of people doing chores.

"…So friends, this is how we got dragged into the mountain step by step by doing the delivery task forced upon us to and fro…. Although I don't know where has the frontline been pushed to, but the area around here cannot be called rear anymore."

Ikta murmured while biting on the thin toasted bread which was the staple food.

The time was now dusk of the evening. In the camp amid the valley you could see the wounded sent back from the frontline, as well as the medics taking care of them who were hurriedly running left and right.

Although this development to him was still within the range of estimation, however the past him, who was still at the rear, was dragged into this quagmire with speeds faster than anticipated… The civil war had obliviously been going on for more than a month and half, yet no clear result came, which only made the soldiers' anxiety and uneasiness grow further.

"Even with no achievements they should still prepare some countermeasure, like to exaggerate the reports of victories to maintain the morale… Don't tell me Lieutenant General Safida couldn't even take into account such small matter?"

While what Ikta said were only in words, if that really happened then it too would become something to be worried about, as he was thinking about is, he walked toward a tent with a basket in hand containing bread, tea and fruits. After closing in to the light leaking from fissure of the cloth covering the tent, one could hear the faint groan of injured coming from inside.

When he was just about to go in and greet, the curtain got lifted and a woman walked out. It was Haro with her medical apron deeply stained with the wounded's blood. Once she saw Ikta, she took off the apron and revealed a stiff smile on her ashen face.

"Good evening, Ikta-san…. don't tell me, that's my dinner?"

"That's right. Eating in the headquarters while hearing the higher-ups talk acrimony is unbearable, so I slipped out using the excuse delivering food to you. Let's eat together, Haro."



While talking Ikta lifted his hand and showed the basket. Haro softly smiled seemingly embarrassed.

“Sure… but, look at my appearance, won’t this affect appetite…?”

Haro asked while indicating to the uniform which still had traces of blood everywhere although she removed the apron. Just this was sufficient to figure out the reason of her poor complexion. As member of the medics’ division, Haro was exposed the harsh reality of the battlefield before anyone else in the order of knights.

However, Ikta totally did not care for such thing and with no change in expression, shrugged.

“It’s unfortunate that tonight’s menu does not includes tomatoes.”

“…Haha, is that so? Then let’s eat together.”

The two found an appropriate spot beneath the shade of a tree and sat there. Under the low light of Kusu’s Lantern which created shadows, Ikta and Haro begun eating the simple foods and started a conversation.

“The field hospital’s business seems to be booming, the soldiers sent from the frontline are only growing.”

“Yeah, I’m rushing off my feet. Furthermore, the inventory of bandages, splints and disinfectants are already bottoming out.”

“I thought so. Although we have been refilling them day and night, honestly we do not have enough manpower. Like even now Yatori is still making the horses run around, borrowing some of light spirits from my troops as light source to shine on the road.”

Ikta said so with a disapproving tone. Haro who was sipping her tea while talking, suddenly stiffened her face.

"……Ikta-san. After finishing dinner, I intend do a report to the higher-ups."

"Yes, we need to propose to reduce this front's field, while also send a part of injured back to the rear at once right?"

Ikta finished her sentence. Haro only blankly stared at him.

"You definitely need to propose that. I wanted to tell them that before coming, but then I though your words as a medic would be more persuasive so I restrained myself. The least we have to do is move the field hospital more into the rear…. specifically, it needs to be re-set at lower altitude."

"…. Ikta-san, when did you notice it…?"

"I already expected this since Lieutenant General Safida announced we would invade into the Grand Arfatra Mountains, furthermore I just had to in the fact that lately many soldiers were sent back with no trauma at all… Although I warned them of the dangers before this started, however it seems even having talked so much nothing reached the top brass' ears."

Haro looked at Ikta who was unhappily scratching his head and felt once again she got a glimpse of this youth's unfathomable strength.

In this kind of busy life that simply made people disoriented, how could he notice such tremendous amount of details in areas outside of his duties? Haro totally couldn't comprehend how broad his perspective was.



Right then, sounds of hoofs stomping the ground came from behind. Noticing the sound Ikta lifted Kusu and its lamp on his head to send out signals, which made the incineration division's leader at the front leave the troops and rode there on horse.

"I have just come back, were you two eating?"

"You have worked hard, Yatori. Your portion is in the basket as well, come back to eat after you leave the horse…."

"You guys sure looks to be enjoying yourselves."

Ikta's sentence was interrupted, with fatigued faces, Matthew and Torway walked there from the direction of the headquarters. Wherein the youth with a few extra pounds with embittered look, stared at the three.

"Especially you, Ikta! Don't run away from the Captain's nagging alone, put yourself in our shoes whom got told off with your portion as well!"

"That's so regrettable, Matthew, I thought I could understand your feelings better than anyone else. Are we not best friends?"

"Did you know? Each time you speak of best friends, the meaning it represents diminish. Now the its value should be so light it could make balloons afloat huh?"

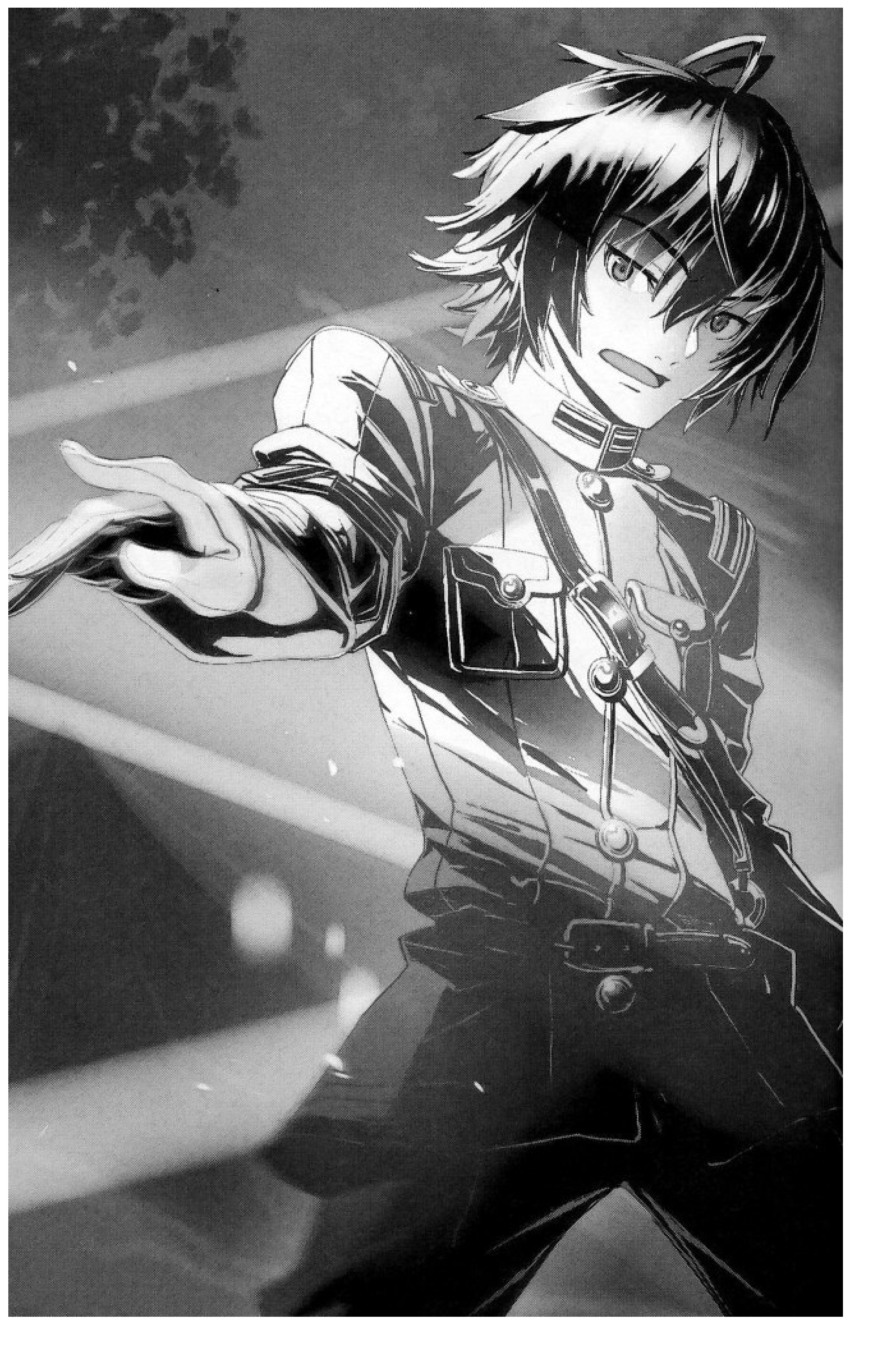
"The dinner earlier truly was bad for our stomach…. let's drink tea together to clear our mouths."

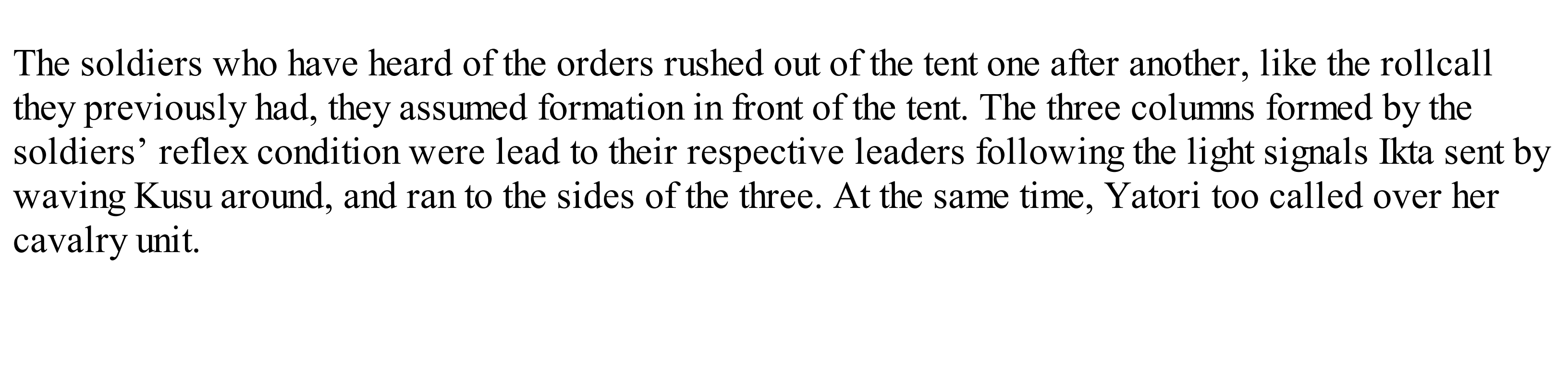
Everybody approved of Torway's idea. However, just when Yatori was about to go leave the horse, panicked screams from the soldiers stationed at the front of the camp reverberated through the base. The person running at the forefront shouted with a sharp voice:

“Ene…Enemy attack! Someone, come help engage! Please!”

The field became noisy in an instant. Before their voices could be buried by the growing chaos, Ikta promptly shouted to the tent their troops were resting.

“Platoon Ikta! Platoon Matthew! Platoon Torway! Take up your arms and assume formation in front of the tents! Fast!”




The soldiers who have heard of the orders rushed out of the tent one after another, like the rollcall they previously had, they assumed formation in front of the tent. The three columns formed by the soldiers' reflex condition were lead to their respective leaders following the light signals Ikta sent by waving Kusu around, and ran to the sides of the three. At the same time, Yatori too called over her cavalry unit.

"Yatorishino's cavalry platoon will standby in situ! Wait for my instructions!"

Ikta handled the situation relying on the analytical skill he was born with, Yatori and Torway too started moving almost at the same time, Matthew and Haro were a breath later in keeping up. As reaction speed goes, their troops could be said to be exceptional.

"–Captain! Enemy attack, please give instructions!"

After rushing into the tent, Yatori immediately tried to get the orders from the superior inside. The fourth instructor who got the power to command them– Captain Nikafuma ran out of the tent and stared with livid face the front of the camp where reports of enemy attack were coming.

"How is this possible, hasn't this area long been under our control… enemies… where are the enemies?"

"This is a night raid Captain, I'm afraid the enemy is attacking without using lights and it would be really difficult to identify them with naked eye."

"Is… is that so… that makes sense… at the front of the camp are stationed the guarding troops, if we leave it to them…"

The field was set to be in a rectangular formation, the length from left to right was short side whist the long one was from front to rear; in order not to block the line of sight from front to rear, the tents were

longitudinally aligned. In addition to that, the front also had a space left for engaging battle, in such situation they had to pull up a defensive line and meet the enemy there.

“Then our troops will wait armed behind the engaging point. This way we could guard the sides from enemy assaults, and at the same time be ready to support in case the front was to collapse, how does this sound?”

Ikta gave up on the competences of Captain Nikafuma and had made a specific proposal.

“Ugh…yeah, right, that’s good. No matter what don’t let them get close to the headquarters and the field hospital.”

“About that, what should we do regarding the field hospital? We have to take into consideration all scenarios…”

“That…that’s right, we must have them be prepared to quickly evacuate at given order…. You are Warrant Officer Haroma right? Good, go immediately to the field hospital and tell that to the person in charge.”

After nodding, Haro started to run. The others too looked like they didn’t have any more business with the Captain and returned to their troops. Next, they moved the soldiers as instructed, assumed battle formation behind the battlefield at the front of the camp and formed a second line of defense.

“I… I say, Ikta… although you said that earlier but is it really the best for us not to join the forces in fight? Isn’t it basic knowledge to converge forces?”

“It’s really chaotic at the front, if we were to merge our forces because we are in a hurry, then our troops would be affected too. Right now calmly overlooking the situation from behind is the smartest choice. Also if we were to join with allied forces, the command would be transferred to their captain as well.”

As they were more and more forced into dangerous situations, Ikta's desire to keep the decisional and acting right and responsibility to himself increased as well. Matthew thought that was the key difference that separate him from normal people… Because generally in such situation you would want to push responsibilities onto someone else.

"Then Ikta, our temporary supreme commander is decided to be you huh?"

"It seems so. Although you too were an option, but if possible a cavalry such as yourself would want to be in charge of offensives right? Which is why you would be more suitable for that than me who prefers to move as little as possible."

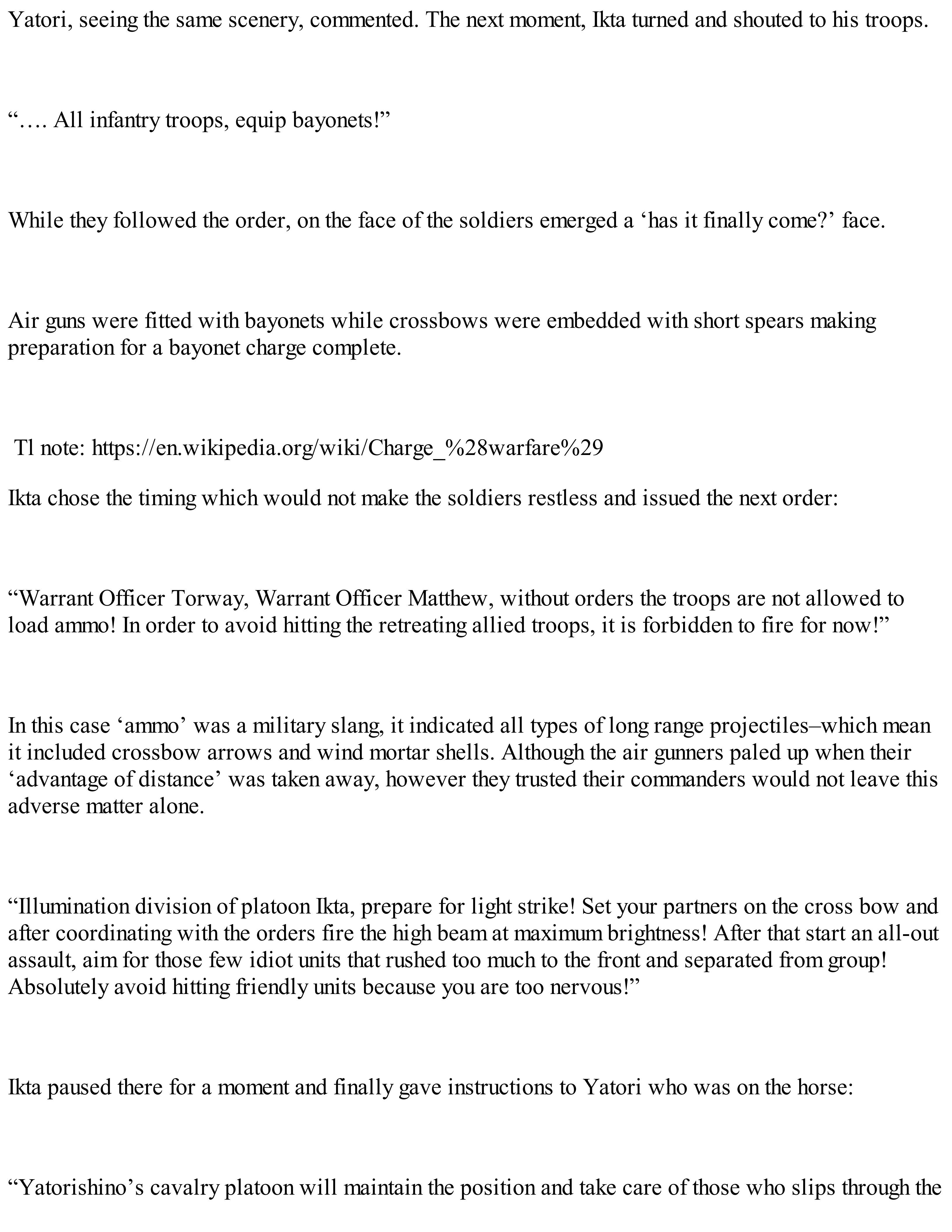
"Heck, I even displayed such hope on my face? I should also try to be more low profile."

Seeing the two who were boldly smiling and joking around, with such talent in maintaining calmness right before facing enemies, made Matthew stare at them feeling incredulous. Even Torway felt like that.

As screams and roars coming from afar reached his ears, his hands gripping the air gun started to tremble. His emotions could not keep up with the rapid change of going from normality to war. Just the thought of how he was about to shoot at enemies made him unable to stop his feet. Although this was not the first time he has killed, the feeling of doing something irreparable had not changed.

Without waiting for them to be prepared, the battle moved to the next stage. In Ikta's field of view a large amount of silhouettes seemed to be running back disorderly from the front. He widened his eyes in the darkness trying to identify them– those are not enemies but allies. Was their rear attacked when they returned from the supply mission? If so, then enemies should still be following from behind.

"Not good, the formation has scattered. From the look of it the enemies and allies from the back will mix in together"



Yatori, seeing the same scenery, commented. The next moment, Ikta turned and shouted to his troops.

"…. All infantry troops, equip bayonets!"

While they followed the order, on the face of the soldiers emerged a 'has it finally come?' face.

Air guns were fitted with bayonets while crossbows were embedded with short spears making preparation for a bayonet charge complete.

Tl note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charge_%28warfare%29

Ikta chose the timing which would not make the soldiers restless and issued the next order:

"Warrant Officer Torway, Warrant Officer Matthew, without orders the troops are not allowed to load ammo! In order to avoid hitting the retreating allied troops, it is forbidden to fire for now!"

In this case 'ammo' was a military slang, it indicated all types of long range projectiles–which mean it included crossbow arrows and wind mortar shells. Although the air gunners paled up when their 'advantage of distance' was taken away, however they trusted their commanders would not leave this adverse matter alone.

"Illumination division of platoon Ikta, prepare for light strike! Set your partners on the cross bow and after coordinating with the orders fire the high beam at maximum brightness! After that start an all-out assault, aim for those few idiot units that rushed too much to the front and separated from group! Absolutely avoid hitting friendly units because you are too nervous!"

Ikta paused there for a moment and finally gave instructions to Yatori who was on the horse:

"Yatorishino's cavalry platoon will maintain the position and take care of those who slips through the

net! However, after the battle starts you will calculate the right timing and give orders to charge in and take care of the enemy in one fell swoop. After that deploy guerrilla tactics at the discretion of platoon leaders…That's all!"

After finishing giving orders, Ikta once again faced the enemy while at the same time installed the short spear and Kusu on his crossbow. After adding the spirit's weight made beam equipment lose efficiency in melee combat, however especially in night battles, the advantage of illuminating any direction at will is greater than everything. All troops were ready, the next was waiting for an opportunity. At that moment– Matthew throttled close to Ikta and while keeping his head down asked a question:

"…Ikta, I know it is shameful, but can I ask a question?"

"Matthew, my best friend, you can ask me whatever you want."

Then the youth with slightly plump body swallowed the worthless feeling of asking such a question and opened his mouth:

"…What do I have to do to be able to keep being calm like you…?"

While Matthew was speaking, he had his thumb firmly pressed into the center of his palm, and was trying to get his body to stop trembling. A short distance away, the figure of Torway nervously pacing back and forth could also be seen.

Ikta, after seeing the condition of the two, stretched his arm around the neck of the slightly plump youth and with a low volume whispered into his ear:

"…. Let me tell you a story Matthew. Long, long ago, there were two generals."

“…..?”

“One was a brave general, he always fought off enemies with a smile; the other was cowardly, he never fought a disadvantageous battle. At a certain banquet the cowardly general asked the courageous one: ‘What do I have to do to not fear war?’ hearing this question the brave general with no sarcasm, sincerely asked back: ‘I on the other hand really want you to tell how to be like you, how can you maintain calmness even in those hellish situations?.’ the cowardly general could not answer– during the following war the courageous general fell to a nameless soldier.”

“…………”

“Directly facing your own cowardice, while also trying to improve. This time you are already calm enough, Matthew– You do not need to worry, you will stop trembling the moment the battle starts.”

Ikta convincingly asserted so and patted on his shoulder– Matthew just silently nodded, perhaps he became relatively calmer, he then turned back to his own troops.

After moving away his gaze from the friend’s back, Ikta once again focused on the front. The soldiers fleeing passed from their sides–

These were people from the army. However, just as Yatori has said, amid the battlefield it must already be in a state of chaotic mixture between allies and foes.

The soldiers who charged to the front of the camp in high spirit to fight the enemy got surprised and scared, they could not elaborate a decision to engage close quarter and ended up watching from the sidelines. Looking at that it would have been better if they just let them go through instead of staying in the middle like a sieve.

In other words, right now–being in front of the field hospital which was filled to the brim and the headquarters, the remaining defense was only their own units.

“…. Platoon Ikta, aim at the front with your partners.”

A particularly large group of people rushed to them. They could see enemies raising the Kukri blade reflecting the moonlight among people wearing military outfits. The youth forcefully sucked air into his lungs–and then…

“–Irradiate!”

Following the order dozens of light spirits released their high beam at maximum output. The darkness was dispersed by the yellow light, the people whose vision was blinded by the intense brightness naturally raised their hands to cover their eyes and stood in place. Grasping this golden opportunity where no matter allies or foes all were equally defenseless….

“Charge!”

The unleashed soldiers released a violent roar and fiercely struck at the immobile prey.

The short spears’ tip penetrated chests, the sharp edge of bayonets cut into necks. Three soldiers forming a group each cut down an enemy, then stepping on the dead enemies’ body they moved on to the next target.

Although the greatest advantage comes for a few seconds the light was cast, however as long as they were fighting in light, the effect of blurred vision will last for many minutes, taking advantage of this short time frame to take care of the enemy was a must. To archieve maximum efficiency, they had to form three man groups and push forward. The soldiers, while giving a pat on the shoulder of the friendly units running back, slashed the back of the enemies who happened to be nearby. This battle could not be called a fight anymore, it was a straight forward massacre, there was no room for mercy.

“Lights off! …We managed to get through the first wave! Torway, Matthew reset and group back

here!”

Ikta remained indifferent and with merciless words kept directing the effective killing. Of course he too participated in battle, utilizing the time he used to ascertain the status of the battle, he dealt a fatal blow to the Shinaak warrior groaning at his feet by piercing through his eye socket with the short spear.

“P-Platoon Matthew, two lightly wounded, no damage to the main unit!”

“Platoon Torway, three lightly wounded, will not affect the operation!”

After the report of the two Platoon leader Ikta nodded while getting rid of the blood on his short spear.

“Good, well done… Our fleeing troops seems to have gotten behind us, you are now allowed to fire. I am afraid the next wave will be the enemy’s main unit, they may not fall for the same trick again, do not expect to be able to attack while they are under of inhibited vision.”

Thus Ikta had his subordinates assume formation for a light strike, Matthew and Torway too had their men fed bullets into their air guns.

However, when they had just put some distance, the enemy suddenly fired shots. The bullets swept at their sides making a chill run back at both of their spines.

The light strike of the illumination division also had its risks. The enemy was not assuming line formation that could make up the accuracy with firing density, furthermore they were in total darkness and shooting randomly which was why in this case they wouldn’t just be hit by stray bullets. However, it would be another story after the light strike revealed the position of the troops. The enemy bullets would be concentrating in the direction source of the light and it would be impossible for the soldiers to fend it off.


“I will leave the front to you two– Suuya! We will use cross illumination! I will count on you for the left wing!”

“Yes, Sir!”

After separating into two groups, platoon Ikta ran left and right and assumed position behind the trees used as covers– The light strike did not necessarily have to be frontal, there were also uses such as aiming from a safe zone and striking with both sides.

“Irradiate!”

The beams from left and right exposed the figures of Shinaak warriors in a corner of the night. They obliviously fired back at the light sources, but Ikta and others already have taken cover behind the trees. Although the effect of hampering the vision was low, but under these circumstances it was not an issue. Because….

“”Fire!””

Matthew and Torway’s air gunner units, who were embattled right in front of the enemy, already grasped their position from Ikta’s earlier beams and proceeded to attack. Facing the uniform shooting from a rock solid formation, the enemies at the front collapsed one after another.

“Good, it’s time to clear things up– Go Yatori!”

Ikta started flashing the high beam to the rear to send signals, receiving the instruction the Yatorishino Igsem cavalry platoon charged forward as if they could hardly wait. They were separated into two groups and rendezvoused after passing to the left and right of platoon Matthew and platoon Torway rearranging into neat columns in the short distance.

“Ready your swords! We first break through the middle to cut off the enemy then turn back and wipe them out!”

They too had a good grasp of the enemy’s position after the earlier cross illumination. To the enemy who had already suffered a major blow from the shootings of air gunners, the appearance of charging cavalry was the embodiment of despair.

The cavalry’s great speeds and massive blows mercilessly ravaged them. The charging horses crushed bones, the short spears in the riders’ hand pierced torsos one after another.

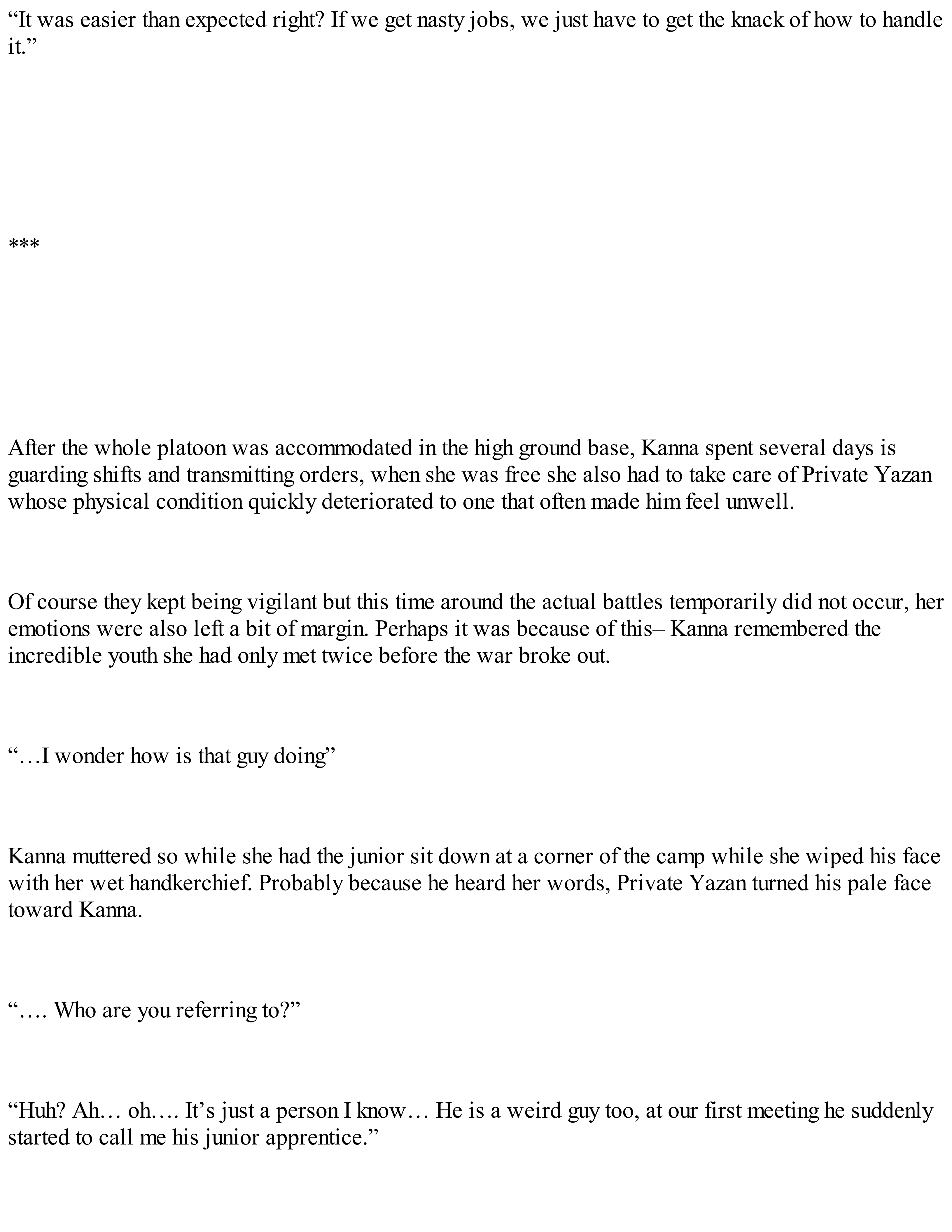
Once there is an opportunity for cavalry units to get close, the enemy wouldn’t have any mean to stop their charge. By the stormy charge they were separated into two halves, their fate afterward was subjected to a pincer attack by the air guns shooting from the front and the cavalry from the back.

“Yeah, this is over.”

Ikta watching the scenery which was mostly settled up said so without showing emotions. Soon after once he saw the enemy could no longer form organized resistance, he joined up with the half team left previously in Suuya’s care and moved next to Torway and Matthew’s units and joined in shooting.

In the end, of the more than one hundred twenty people the enemy had, seven tenths died, two tenths escaped and the remaining one tenths were captured alive and became prisoners of war. Of the units commanded by Ikta who were at about the same numbers, although eight were wounded, however their injuries were all light.

Killing a hundred enemies while only getting eight injured. Even one were to consider in the factor of luck, but still this destructive power was way too abnormal. The black haired youth who produced such result barely mentioned his victory, but facing the soldiers looking at him with eyes full of expectation and reverence he casually said these words once:


"It was easier than expected right? If we get nasty jobs, we just have to get the knack of how to handle it."

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After the whole platoon was accommodated in the high ground base, Kanna spent several days is guarding shifts and transmitting orders, when she was free she also had to take care of Private Yazan whose physical condition quickly deteriorated to one that often made him feel unwell.

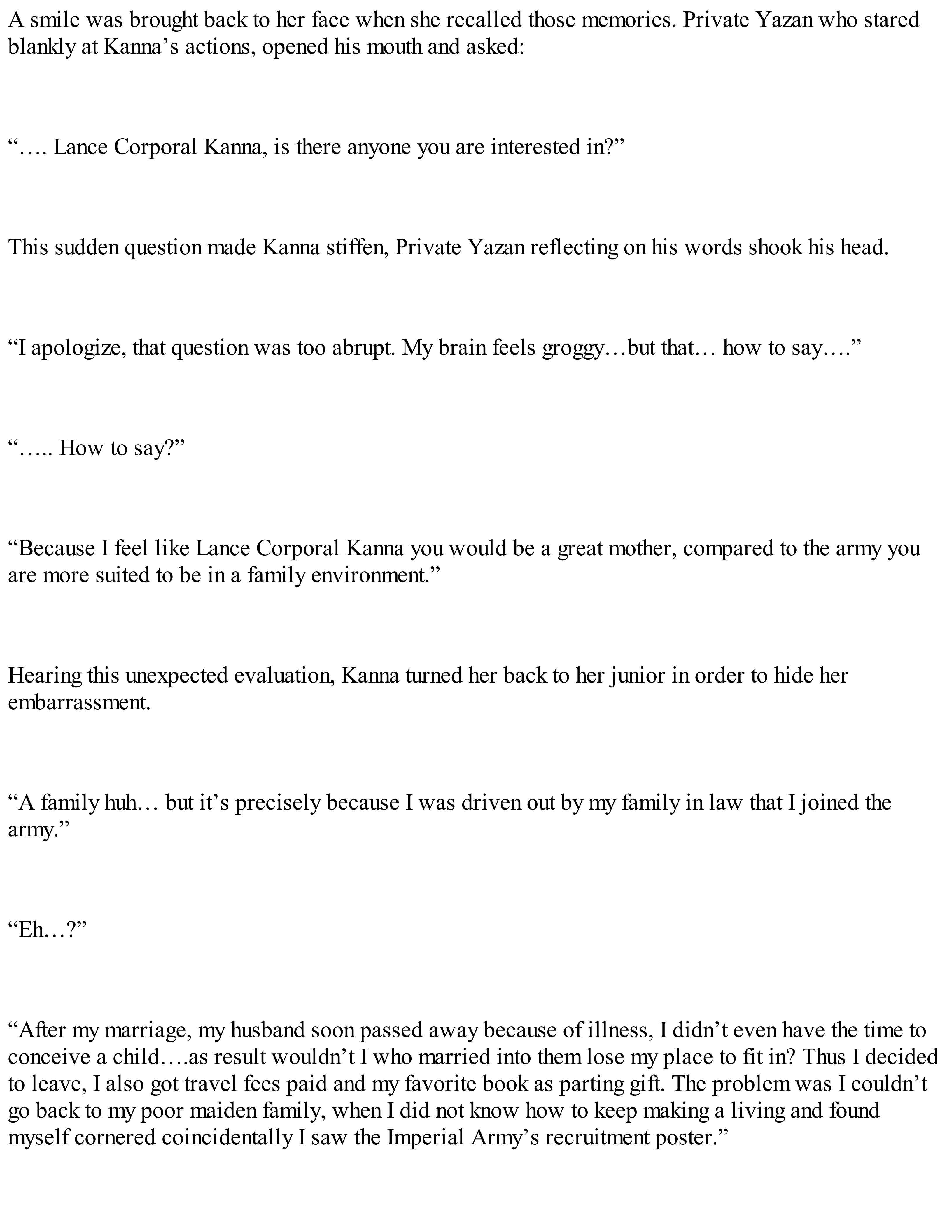
Of course they kept being vigilant but this time around the actual battles temporarily did not occur, her emotions were also left a bit of margin. Perhaps it was because of this– Kanna remembered the incredible youth she had only met twice before the war broke out.

"…I wonder how is that guy doing"

Kanna muttered so while she had the junior sit down at a corner of the camp while she wiped his face with her wet handkerchief. Probably because he heard her words, Private Yazan turned his pale face toward Kanna.

"…. Who are you referring to?"

"Huh? Ah… oh…. It's just a person I know… He is a weird guy too, at our first meeting he suddenly started to call me his junior apprentice."


A smile was brought back to her face when she recalled those memories. Private Yazan who stared blankly at Kanna's actions, opened his mouth and asked:

"…. Lance Corporal Kanna, is there anyone you are interested in?"

This sudden question made Kanna stiffen, Private Yazan reflecting on his words shook his head.

"I apologize, that question was too abrupt. My brain feels groggy…but that… how to say…."

"….. How to say?"

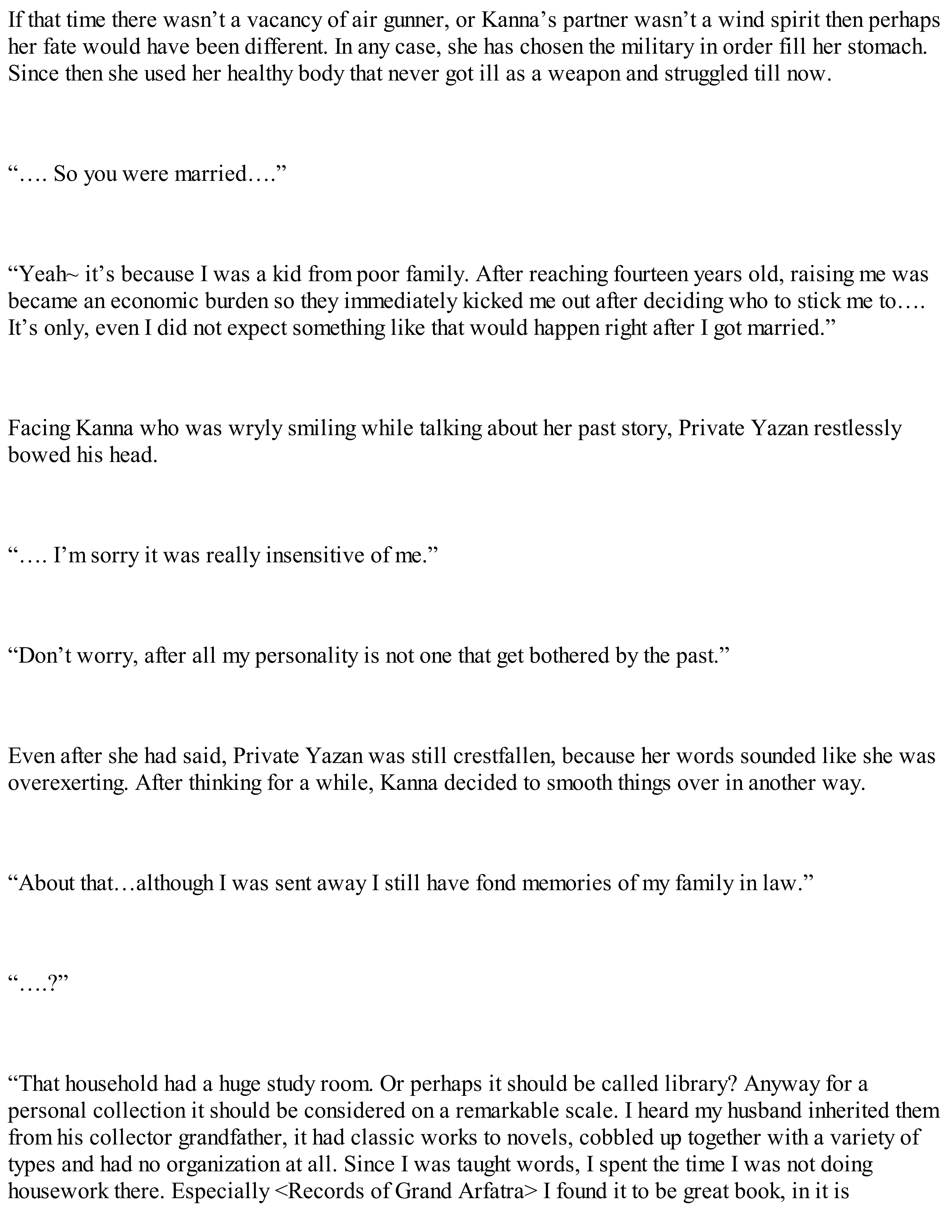
"Because I feel like Lance Corporal Kanna you would be a great mother, compared to the army you are more suited to be in a family environment."

Hearing this unexpected evaluation, Kanna turned her back to her junior in order to hide her embarrassment.

"A family huh… but it's precisely because I was driven out by my family in law that I joined the army."

"Eh…?"

"After my marriage, my husband soon passed away because of illness, I didn't even have the time to conceive a child….as result wouldn't I who married into them lose my place to fit in? Thus I decided to leave, I also got travel fees paid and my favorite book as parting gift. The problem was I couldn't go back to my poor maiden family, when I did not know how to keep making a living and found myself cornered coincidentally I saw the Imperial Army's recruitment poster."



If that time there wasn't a vacancy of air gunner, or Kanna's partner wasn't a wind spirit then perhaps her fate would have been different. In any case, she has chosen the military in order fill her stomach. Since then she used her healthy body that never got ill as a weapon and struggled till now.

"…. So you were married…."

"Yeah~ it's because I was a kid from poor family. After reaching fourteen years old, raising me was became an economic burden so they immediately kicked me out after deciding who to stick me to…. It's only, even I did not expect something like that would happen right after I got married."

Facing Kanna who was wryly smiling while talking about her past story, Private Yazan restlessly bowed his head.

"…. I'm sorry it was really insensitive of me."

"Don't worry, after all my personality is not one that get bothered by the past."

Even after she had said, Private Yazan was still crestfallen, because her words sounded like she was overexerting. After thinking for a while, Kanna decided to smooth things over in another way.

"About that…although I was sent away I still have fond memories of my family in law."

"….?"

"That household had a huge study room. Or perhaps it should be called library? Anyway for a personal collection it should be considered on a remarkable scale. I heard my husband inherited them from his collector grandfather, it had classic works to novels, cobbled up together with a variety of types and had no organization at all. Since I was taught words, I spent the time I was not doing housework there. Especially <Records of Grand Arfatra> I found it to be great book, in it is


meticulously described the time the author spent living with the Shinaak tribe, it was even more entertaining than poorly written novels. Yeah I was really happy back then…."

Kanna lifted her gaze from Private Yasan who could not really understand and recalled the atmosphere of that room filled with the smell of books…. That place was filled with unknown worlds, it even made her frustrated to be kicked out before she even finished going through half of the collection. And most importantly that place made Kanna understand the joy of 'Seeking Knowledge'.

"…If it's that guy, will he teach me more of it? About that Science…."

If it really was going to happen that would be great, Kanna though. She found a reason she could strongly pray to, for this she must get back alive.

"…. Lance Corporal Kanna you really do love books."

"Yes, a lot. Basically if its content is something I don't know about, any book would be fine."

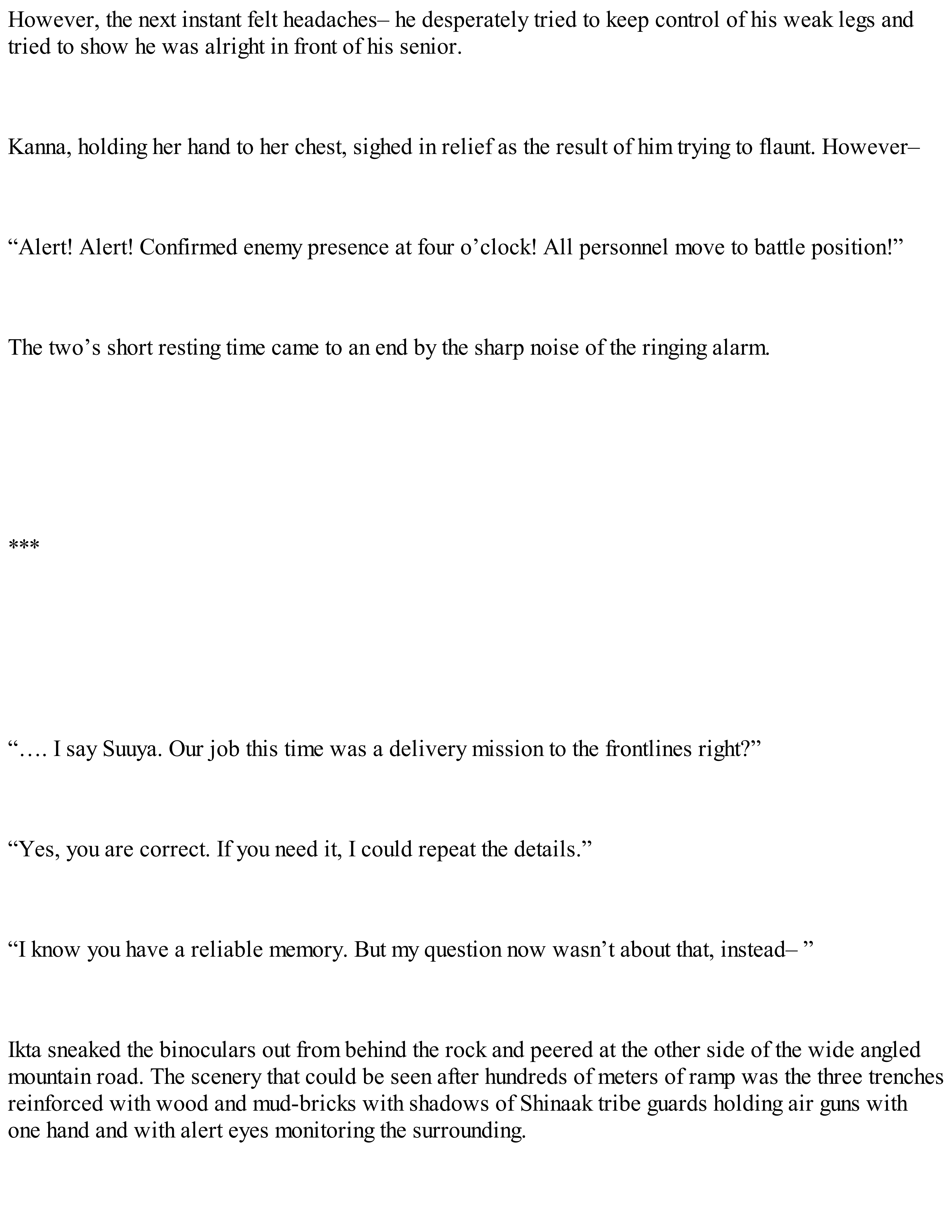
Seeing Kanna nodding with a smile Private Yazan scratched his cheek with his finger.

"…. Next time let me gift you a book you like. Because of how I am always troubling you, consider it a present in return."

"Eh? I'm really happy but…. books are quite expensive, are you sure about it?"

"Is that so? ….. But during the first battle you saved my life, so the least I could do is to pay a price equivalent to my life. If it were to cost more than that then I could only ask you to give up."

Since he recovered to a point he could joke around, Private Yazan stood up patting his knees.



However, the next instant felt headaches– he desperately tried to keep control of his weak legs and tried to show he was alright in front of his senior.

Kanna, holding her hand to her chest, sighed in relief as the result of him trying to flaunt. However–

“Alert! Alert! Confirmed enemy presence at four o’clock! All personnel move to battle position!”

The two’s short resting time came to an end by the sharp noise of the ringing alarm.

***

“…. I say Suuya. Our job this time was a delivery mission to the frontlines right?”

“Yes, you are correct. If you need it, I could repeat the details.”

“I know you have a reliable memory. But my question now wasn’t about that, instead– ”

Ikta sneaked the binoculars out from behind the rock and peered at the other side of the wide angled mountain road. The scenery that could be seen after hundreds of meters of ramp was the three trenches reinforced with wood and mud-bricks with shadows of Shinaak tribe guards holding air guns with one hand and with alert eyes monitoring the surrounding.

“–What do we have to do in the case the delivery post had already been captured by the enemy?”

Ikta, with a face like he had enough of it already, made this conclusion. Anyway the reconnaissance he was ordered to has finished so he decided to lead the soldiers back from the same route they came from. While being careful not letting out any noises, they spent ten minutes going down the mountain road, the main transporting units were waiting for them below there.

“I went to ascertain of the situation. Unfortunately, the post in front of us has really been taken by the enemy.”

Lieutenant Niger’s mouth twisted as he heard the report. He was the fifth superior Ikta had after coming to the northern region, but if we were to talk about his lack of patience to cope with unfavorable situations he without a doubt ranked first in history.

“…. approximately how many were the enemy’s numbers?”

“As the enemy was located at the top of the slope we couldn’t ascertain their presence within the base. However, we earlier received info that two of our platoons were allocated there, if we consider the layout of the fort and thinking in reverse from there, I guess the enemy’s number should be more than two platoon.”

“Don’t go saying random estimations! Why don’t you go carefully investigate that with your own eyes!”

Lieutenant Niger’s hysterical yelling fell on Ikta’s deaf ears. He was the kind to rage whenever he was in a bad mood, how could Ikta deal with that every time.

“Damn those Shinaak tribe barbarians…. this way we can’t deliver the supplies to the frontline!”

“This was the enemy’s purpose huh? I believe we have to take radical countermeasures in order to maintain a viable supply route.”

“Warrant Officer Yatorishino, you are speaking out of place, it’s an act of transgression! That kind of issue would be tackled by the main headquarter back at the fort!”

Yatori bowed and apologized for being rude. Differently from Ikta who had already half given up to reason with this superior, no matter how many times she was told off, she didn’t stop trying to counsel. This revealed the difference in the two’s personalities.

“In conclusion if we don’t break through here we can’t accomplish our task, and retreating is out of question!”

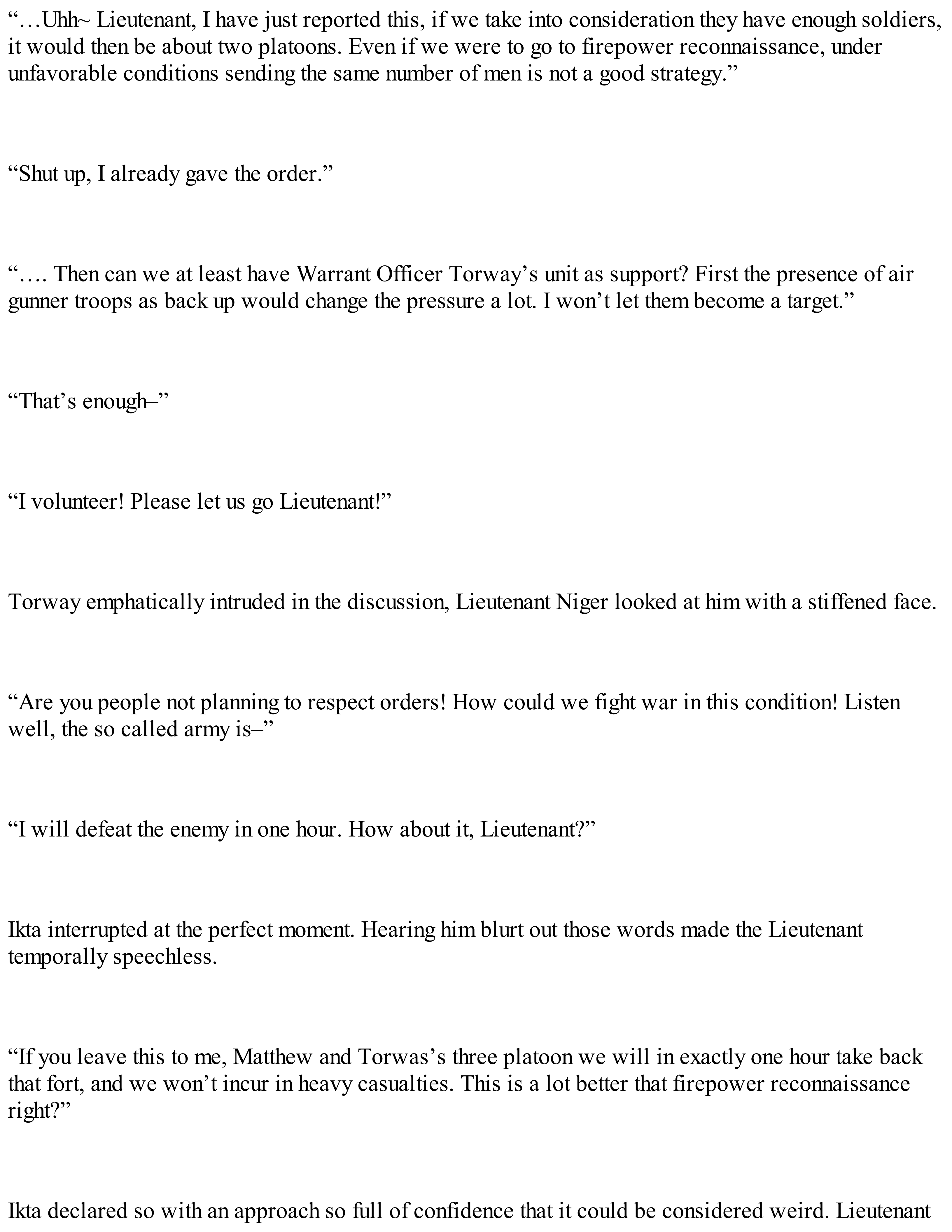
“The terrain is unfavorable to us, if we do a frontal assault I predict we will suffer a quite serious blow.”

“Didn’t I say you are talking too much?! …. First we must grasp of the enemy’s numbers.”

Lieutenant Niger thought for a moment and then issued the command:

“Warrant Officer Ikta, Warrant Officer Matthew. I order your units to go on firepower reconnaissance. Have skirmishes with the enemy and derive the enemy’s force from actual experience.”

Are you kidding?! Ikta though. The firepower reconnaissance approach was as saying ‘let’s first have a battle to measure the enemy’s strength’, not only such practice would put the troops performing it under huge risks it also will definitely end victims. Since retreating appears to be out of question then it would be better to just throw in all troops from the beginning, the act of wasting soldiers’ lives for useless reasons was intolerable.



"…Uhh~ Lieutenant, I have just reported this, if we take into consideration they have enough soldiers, it would then be about two platoons. Even if we were to go to firepower reconnaissance, under unfavorable conditions sending the same number of men is not a good strategy."

"Shut up, I already gave the order."

"…. Then can we at least have Warrant Officer Torway's unit as support? First the presence of air gunner troops as back up would change the pressure a lot. I won't let them become a target."

"That's enough–"

"I volunteer! Please let us go Lieutenant!"

Torway emphatically intruded in the discussion, Lieutenant Niger looked at him with a stiffened face.

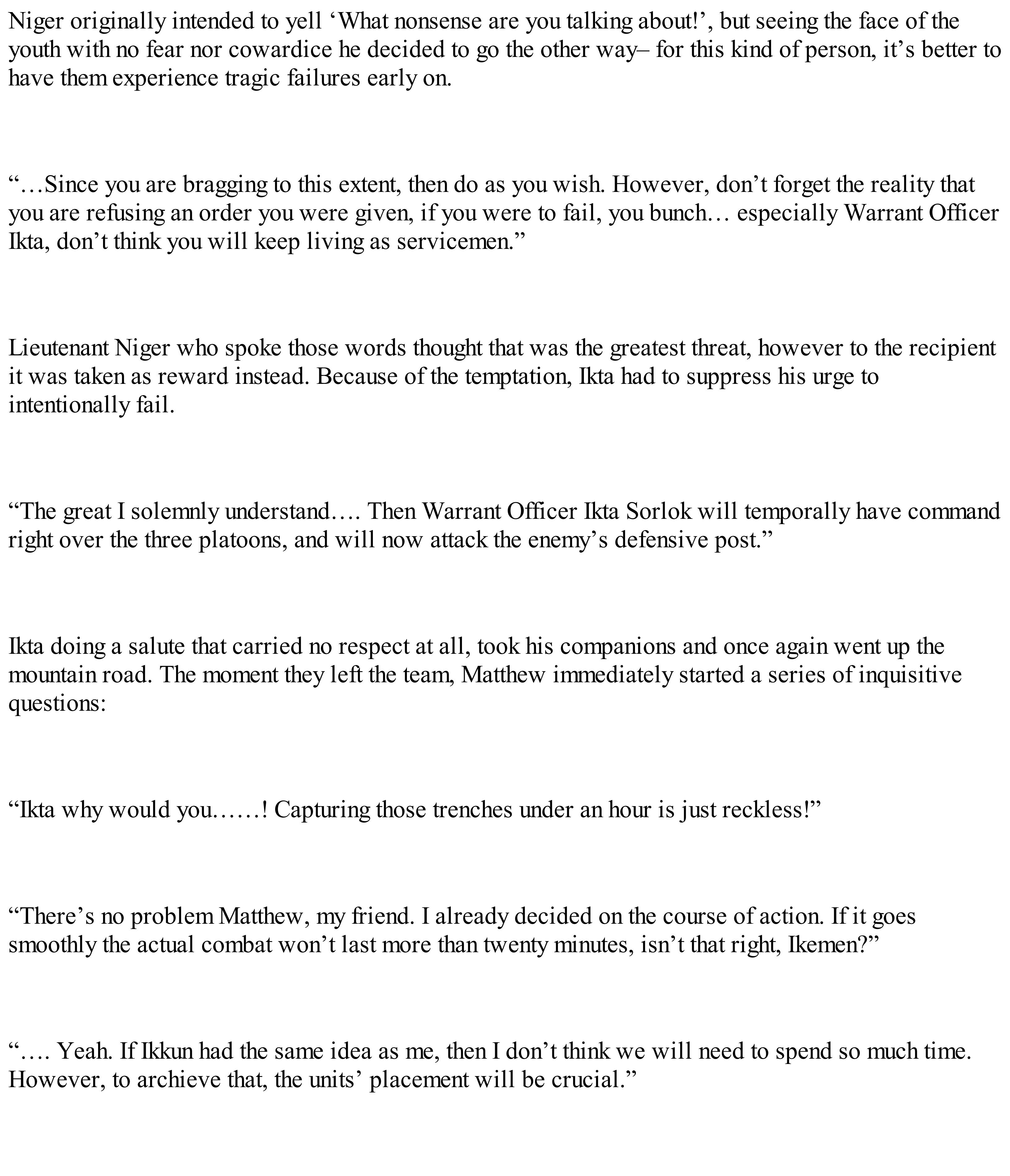
"Are you people not planning to respect orders! How could we fight war in this condition! Listen well, the so called army is–"

"I will defeat the enemy in one hour. How about it, Lieutenant?"

Ikta interrupted at the perfect moment. Hearing him blurt out those words made the Lieutenant temporally speechless.

"If you leave this to me, Matthew and Torwas's three platoon we will in exactly one hour take back that fort, and we won't incur in heavy casualties. This is a lot better that firepower reconnaissance right?"

Ikta declared so with an approach so full of confidence that it could be considered weird. Lieutenant



Niger originally intended to yell ‘What nonsense are you talking about!’, but seeing the face of the youth with no fear nor cowardice he decided to go the other way– for this kind of person, it’s better to have them experience tragic failures early on.

“…Since you are bragging to this extent, then do as you wish. However, don’t forget the reality that you are refusing an order you were given, if you were to fail, you bunch… especially Warrant Officer Ikta, don’t think you will keep living as servicemen.”

Lieutenant Niger who spoke those words thought that was the greatest threat, however to the recipient it was taken as reward instead. Because of the temptation, Ikta had to suppress his urge to intentionally fail.

“The great I solemnly understand…. Then Warrant Officer Ikta Sorlok will temporally have command right over the three platoons, and will now attack the enemy’s defensive post.”

Ikta doing a salute that carried no respect at all, took his companions and once again went up the mountain road. The moment they left the team, Matthew immediately started a series of inquisitive questions:

“Ikta why would you……! Capturing those trenches under an hour is just reckless!”

“There’s no problem Matthew, my friend. I already decided on the course of action. If it goes smoothly the actual combat won’t last more than twenty minutes, isn’t that right, Ikemen?”

“…. Yeah. If Ikkun had the same idea as me, then I don’t think we will need to spend so much time. However, to archieve that, the units’ placement will be crucial.”

Hearing Torway point out the important stuff, Ikta replied with a light nod. After reaching halfway from the trenches he halted the march and shifted his gaze diagonally above, toward the left. The mountain road they were in was in spiral shape, which is why to their right side was a sharp angled downslope while at their left, a steep upslope.

“Can you see there where the terrain forms a lateral protrusion? It’s vertically climbing thirty meters from here. Although I only have visual estimation, I think it is at the same elevation as the enemies’ trenches…. So following the curvature of this road, that protruding position also continues to extend forward for a while.”

“…So that’s how it is, as a result of that you would get a straight trajectory. What is the approximate final distance from the enemy?”

“It should be a little more than one hundred fifty meters. But considering the foothold width, at prone shooting it only has space to accommodate three people in one row.”

“So we can’t bring many men…. I understand, including me I will choose six people from my platoon.”

Ikta and Torway continued discussing, while Matthew, whose understanding couldn’t keep up, was left behind. Shortly after four air gunners were picked up and together with platoon leader Torway gathered in front of Ikta.

“We will depart when your figures disappear behind the protuberance, after that we will begin the attack in exactly five minutes. You will need twenty minutes to climb up the wall, then take the five minutes to set up in a good position. This also includes the time to readjust your breathing, Torway there is no issue about this right?”

Torway once again evaluated their current position to the protrusion and then heavily nodded.

“Good, then you can start climbing. Make me a favor and don’t get spotted by the enemy.”

After getting Ikta’s permission, six people, including Torway, grabbed the ivies and roots and started climbing. Matthew, as he nervously watched their figures leave, once again pressed Ikta:

“Oi! What kind of strategy is this? Are you planning for Torway to provide covering fire while we do a frontal assault?”

“More or less that, are you anxious? Matthew.”

“You are asking if I am anxious?! I am totally fully anxious! You too know that the effective shooting range of air guns is at most forty meters right? That’s right, maybe Torway is able to hit something twenty meters farther away but even that way it only makes sixty meters…. Then how far from the enemy you said those five will be positioned?”

“By visual alone I’d say a bit more than one hundred fifty.”

“There you have the problem! From a place one hundred fifty meters away from the enemy how could they perform an effective covering fire?! Not one shot will hit! Furthermore, there are only six people, even the tactic of using high density shooting to compensate for hit rate is not viable!”

Matthew getting to the point stopped talking and stared at Ikta, he however with expression of heartfelt admiration applauded.

“Thank you for clearly stating the main points. Since long ago I felt that you were very good at explaining to others in an easy way what you couldn’t understand.”

“Your words are totally not praises! That is because your actions are always incomprehensible to others!”

“Okay, okay, calm down. It is true that during the previous battle it was very difficult to see the differences…. but if what I ordered before was truly something impossible then Torway too wouldn’t have simply agreed to it, right?”

With only this sentence Ikta blocked further questions from Matthew, he then revealed a bold smile while looking up the wall.

"–While we were having this conversation, they had already climbed to a relatively high position. Matthew it's almost time to let the soldiers load the bullets. After they are done, have them mount the bayonet too, because this time we are going with a full scale attack from the beginning."

***

The moment enemy columns appeared on their field of vision caused immediate reaction from the warriors of the Shinaak tribe who were guarding the trenches seized from the empire, no, the correct wording would be the trenches they took back, they had already prepared for the next confrontation.

"…The enemy, they have come! Quickly ready the artillery!"

Everyone started moving at the leader's orders, as expected in this fortress their main power still relied on the wind mortars with the addition of gravity. Every trench had two openings and in total six artilleries were set up. The ones tasked for operating the wind mortars quickly rushed to the position they were responsible for.

Although the wind mortars here were of a smaller type, however, for it to function properly it still needed four wind spirits to power and three people to maneuver. After the wind spirits were set up, shells too were loaded, they reached the condition to be able to fire at any time should the orders be given.

“Okay, we are ready! Do we fire?”

“Do not rush! Wait till they get a bit closer!”

The leader calmly waited. Since the shell speed of wind mortars are not great, even if was within the firing range, there was the probability of the enemy dodging if it was too far away. Since the number of shells were limited, they had to fire with the best possible efficiency–this was the knowledge imparted to them by the instructor.

“The distance is two hundred fifty, two hundred forty, two hundred thirty…… two hundred…. good, right now– Gah!”

Just as the leader was about to issue the order, his body fell backward. No, he was not the only one unlucky enough to be the recipient of a surprise attack, in every trench an artillery troop suffered the same fate. Some were leaking fresh blood from the chest, some were leaking from the eyes, but the one thing in common was all were lying motionless on the ground.

“What…! Wh-what happened–”

“It’s gunshots! From where, the guys in front of us clearly are not holding guns– Guh!”

Before they could understand the situation two more fell. The Shinaak tribe warriors who had lost their leader were shaken–

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“First trench, artillery unit hit. Down for a chest wound.”

Twenty meters above Ikta, three air gunners including Torway were prone on the naturally formed protruding eaves of the terrain and sniped at their targets.

“Bullets loaded– trench one, the target is the male on the left. Ready, aim… shoot!”

The slight sound of compressed air exploding echoed. The acorn shaped bulled shot from the muzzle travelled one hundred fifty meters and hit the solar plexus of the man who was desperately trying to lift up one of the fallen companion.

“–Trench two, the enemies are in cover. Prioritize sniping the spirits to get rid of the artillery. Ready, aim… shoot!”

As the sentence finished, triggers were pulled. Behind the three who were actually shooting, there were the same number of people looking through binoculars with lowered body stance. They had four tasks: confirm hits, correct the trajectory based on the results, protect the shooters–and if the case were to call for it, substitute them.

“Trench three, the newly appeared artillery target was hit. It’s a minor wound to the arm, try a follow up.”

“Trench one, no more enemy presence detected, judged to be temporally suppressed. Change to supporting trench two”

They were so quiet that it was scary, the sniping mission was performed with machine-like mindset. That was also natural. Right now they didn't feel the threat of nearby enemies, as such they also did not need to muster the courage to face such threat. Doing a unilateral shooting from one hundred fifty meters away, this sort of stuff has already become simple gestures.

"… our force is beginning the frontal assault. All snipers maintain the status quo and continue with covering fire."

Torway's ordered with ice cold tone, as if he was another person. He then aimed at the next target, very easily adjusted taking into consideration gravity and 'the distance from the target', and pulled the trigger.


帝国式施条風銃試作版
全長 1.2m
重量 4.7kg
必中射程 200～250m
最大有効射程 400m以上



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“The annoying artillery has quieted down huh– good, Charge!”

After estimating the right timing, Ikta and Matthew’s units launched an all-out attack. Including the main force of Torway’s platoon, over one hundred soldiers rushed into the enemy trenches. The battlefield was filled with roars.

“Suuya! Cross illumination! Destroy the enemy’s vision!”

“Yes, Sir!”

Being next to the charging troops with raised bayonets, the illumination troops released the supporting high beam. Part of the enemies distorted their eyes due to the blinding light, weakening their ability to react, taking advantage of this, platoon Matthew took the lead and stormed into the trench.

“”””Whoaooaoaoaoa!””””

Melee battle spread through the narrow trenches. The soldiers cut the head of enemies who didn’t even have time to fit the bayonet, or pushed them down and stabbed their chest with the short spear. Some were howling like beasts, there were also those wailing like babies, at that moment everyone was putting all their focus on how to keep surviving on the abnormal setting that was the “Battlefield”.

“Stop….Please…Help me!”

“…Guh!”

However even in these abnormal situation one could occasionally feel the ripples of normality. The female soldier who threw away her weapon and was asking to be spared was such an example. If the one they were facing were not carried away by the bloodlust, they would be affected and momentarily hesitate whether to strike.

Right now Matthew was in such predicament but in this case it resulted in adverse consequences. Grasping the moment his fighting will wavered, as he was lowering his blade the female Shinaak soldier who was originally pleading jumped over.

“Whoa…! Y-You…!”

Her fingers grasped Matthew’s thick neck, with a grip strength unlike that of a girl she sank her nails into his skin, the woman was being serious. With eyes like beast pushed to a dead end she used all her strength attempting to empty-handed tear his carotid artery.

“Ugh…uugh…Some-Somebody fast–”

The reaper’s footstep was getting closer to Matthew who started having trouble breathing because of the blocked airways. Due to the brain hypoxia*, even the cry for help didn’t come out.

Tl note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypoxia_%28medical%29

Just as his vision was starting to be tainted with red– he saw the female soldier widen her eyes to the limit, then the hands strangling his neck lost strength and her whole body went limp on Matthew.

“Huff…! Cough…Cough, cough… Huff…!”

“You alright Matthew? That won’t do you know, in places like this you can’t go thinking of other things beside killing.”

Ikta, after kicking away the female soldier’s body extended his hand to the friend. Matthew while getting up with his help, looked with teary eyes at the woman– a pinky finger sized hole on the back of her head proved how she already lost her life.

“Cough Cough…S-Sorry, you really saved me there…”

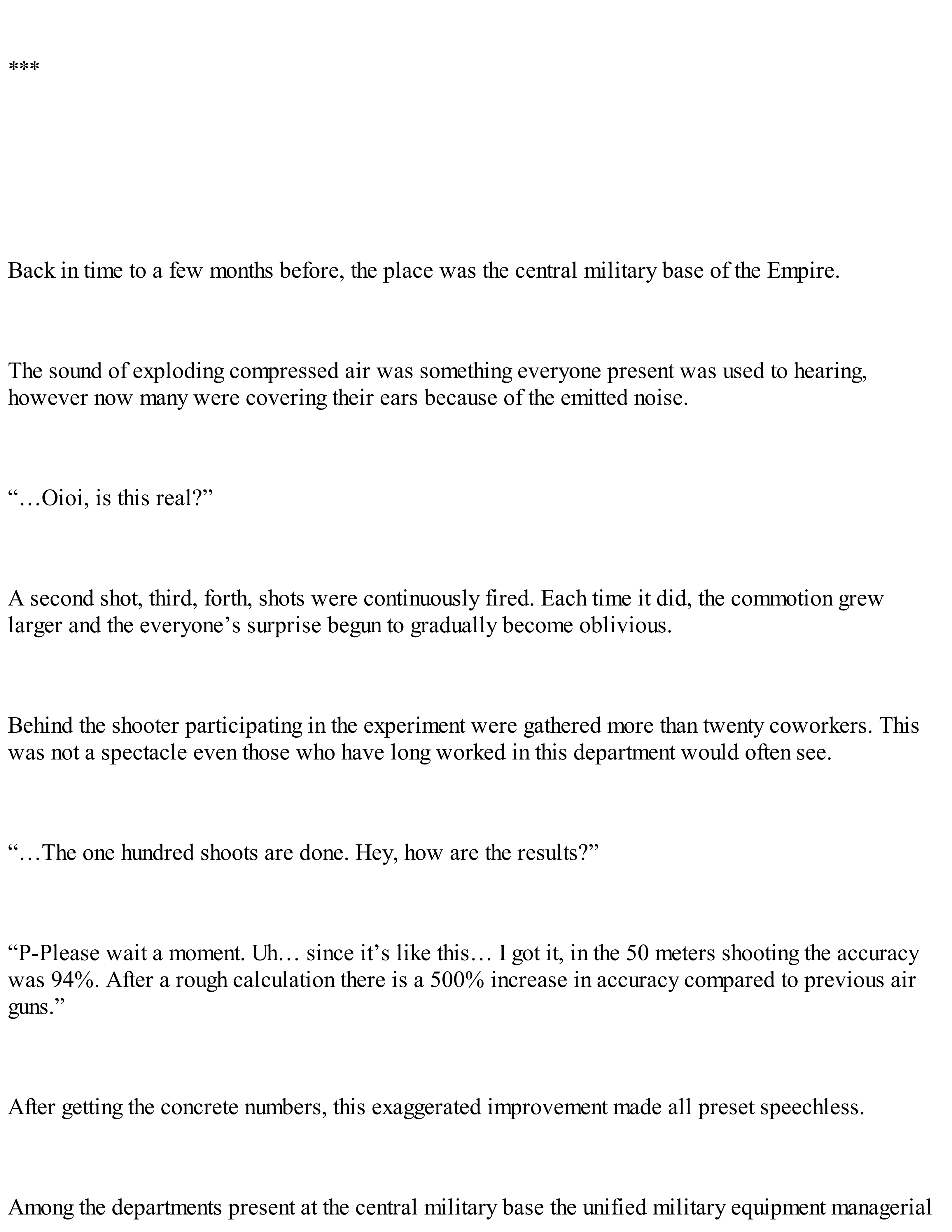
“The one you need to thank is not me but Torway. Seeing clearly two people fighting from 150 meters and then with pinpoint accuracy shoot one of them, of all the people in the world this was something probably only he could have pulled off.”

As Ikta was speaking, he moved his gaze and looked outside the trench. Matthew too, while trembling, stared at the same direction, but with a distance of 150 meters, he couldn’t even spot the figure of the friend.

His mood moved past gratefulness and instead started to cause fear– did he really just got saved from such distance?

“…Good, we should be done with all trenches now. There is no need to force yourselves to chase fleeting enemies but you must check if there are enemies hiding. Ensuring the safety before noticing the main unit to come is an extremely important job.”

Seeing the battle has come to an end, the youth immediately begun to compositely give post-battle orders. Matthew, while helping, was anxiously waiting for the explanation that would come.



***

Back in time to a few months before, the place was the central military base of the Empire.

The sound of exploding compressed air was something everyone present was used to hearing, however now many were covering their ears because of the emitted noise.

“…Oioi, is this real?”

A second shot, third, forth, shots were continuously fired. Each time it did, the commotion grew larger and the everyone’s surprise begun to gradually become oblivious.

Behind the shooter participating in the experiment were gathered more than twenty coworkers. This was not a spectacle even those who have long worked in this department would often see.

“…The one hundred shoots are done. Hey, how are the results?”

“P-Please wait a moment. Uh… since it’s like this… I got it, in the 50 meters shooting the accuracy was 94%. After a rough calculation there is a 500% increase in accuracy compared to previous air guns.”

After getting the concrete numbers, this exaggerated improvement made all preset speechless.

Among the departments present at the central military base the unified military equipment managerial

department was one of the many military facility of the Empire. As the name implies, it was a department responsible to development and production of various military equipment headed by the air guns. The new military technology would be first sent here after coming out from the internal researching R&D department.

"To be able to produce such results from just digging some helical groove inside the barred in accordance with Pakda's blueprint…"

Tl note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rifling

The summoned researchers were also mixed with the spectators but the one concerned was showing a more surprised face than anyone else.

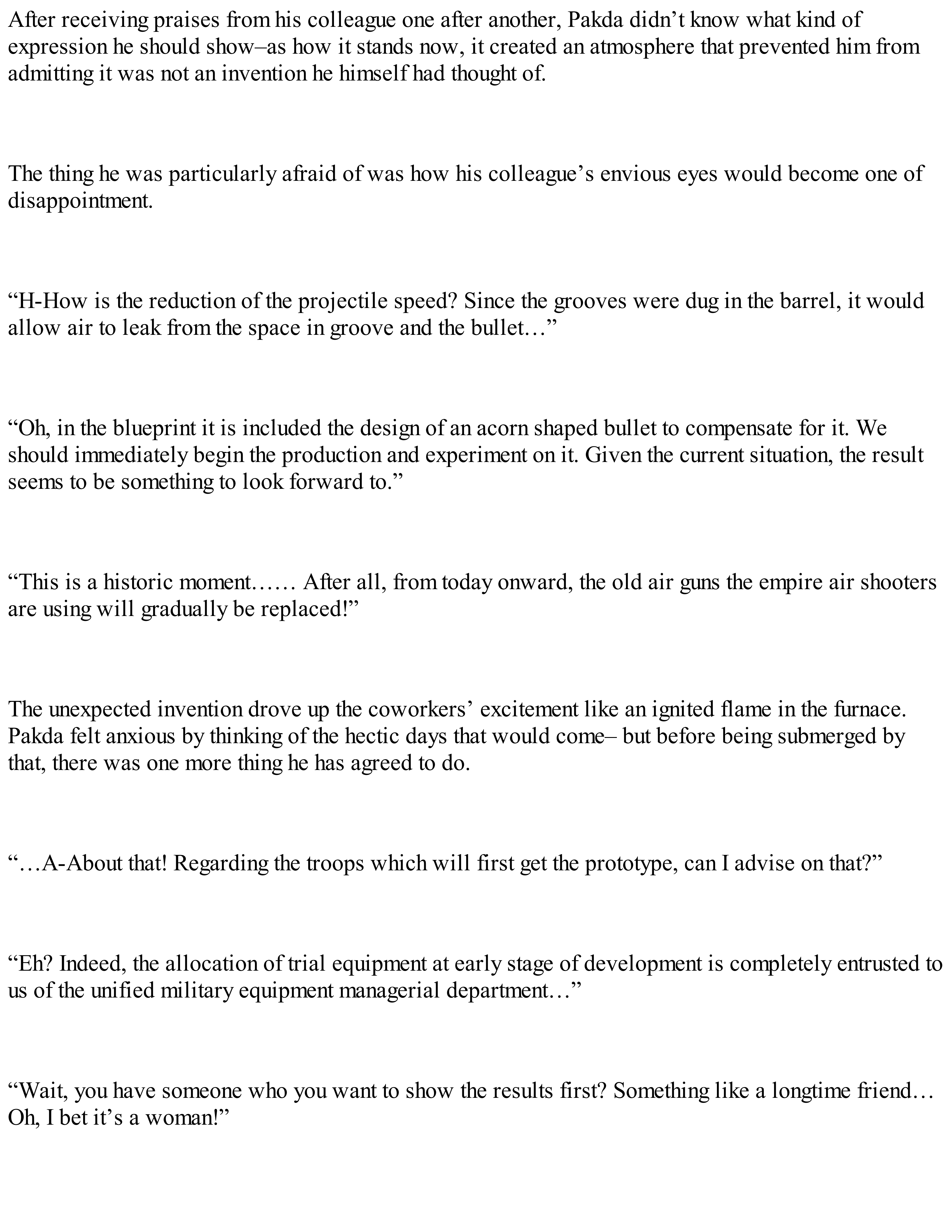
He recalled the guy, the high grade military cadet who was known as being a "freak" who already went to the north, it was precisely that boy the one who handed him the blueprint of this miraculous new air gun.

It was not like Pakda couldn't understand design concepts, that piece of blueprint had the conformity to catch the attention of the leading researchers. It made him deem that no matter what were the results, it would be worth trying to make a prototype. It was just even Pakda couldn't have imagined it would have produced such extreme results.

"Hey you're amazing, Pakda! Stop be dazing around, you should be happy, this is a great merit!"

"Carving helical grooves inside the barred make the fast travelling bullet rotate at high speed which result in improved ballistic stability and straight shooting…is it? Indeed, after hearing the explanation I too can understand the theory."

"To devise something like this from scratch, it must be the work of a genius… I admire you, Pakda. I'm truly sorry, to think I didn't realize you were such an outstanding guy."


After receiving praises from his colleague one after another, Pakda didn't know what kind of expression he should show–as how it stands now, it created an atmosphere that prevented him from admitting it was not an invention he himself had thought of.

The thing he was particularly afraid of was how his colleague's envious eyes would become one of disappointment.

"H-How is the reduction of the projectile speed? Since the grooves were dug in the barrel, it would allow air to leak from the space in groove and the bullet…"

"Oh, in the blueprint it is included the design of an acorn shaped bullet to compensate for it. We should immediately begin the production and experiment on it. Given the current situation, the result seems to be something to look forward to."

"This is a historic moment…… After all, from today onward, the old air guns the empire air shooters are using will gradually be replaced!"

The unexpected invention drove up the coworkers' excitement like an ignited flame in the furnace. Pakda felt anxious by thinking of the hectic days that would come– but before being submerged by that, there was one more thing he has agreed to do.

"…A-About that! Regarding the troops which will first get the prototype, can I advise on that?"

"Eh? Indeed, the allocation of trial equipment at early stage of development is completely entrusted to us of the unified military equipment managerial department…"

"Wait, you have someone who you want to show the results first? Something like a longtime friend… Oh, I bet it's a woman!"



The colleagues surrounding Pakda were noisily speculating on silly reasons. Inside him, he thought it would be better if it really was like that, but on the surface he calmly stared at the highest ranked department head.

“It’s not like I can’t understand your feelings, however… mixing your private life with job is not a commendable behavior, Corporal Pakda.”

“T-That…”

“Although it is not a commendable behavior… But this time you have archieved a great merit.”

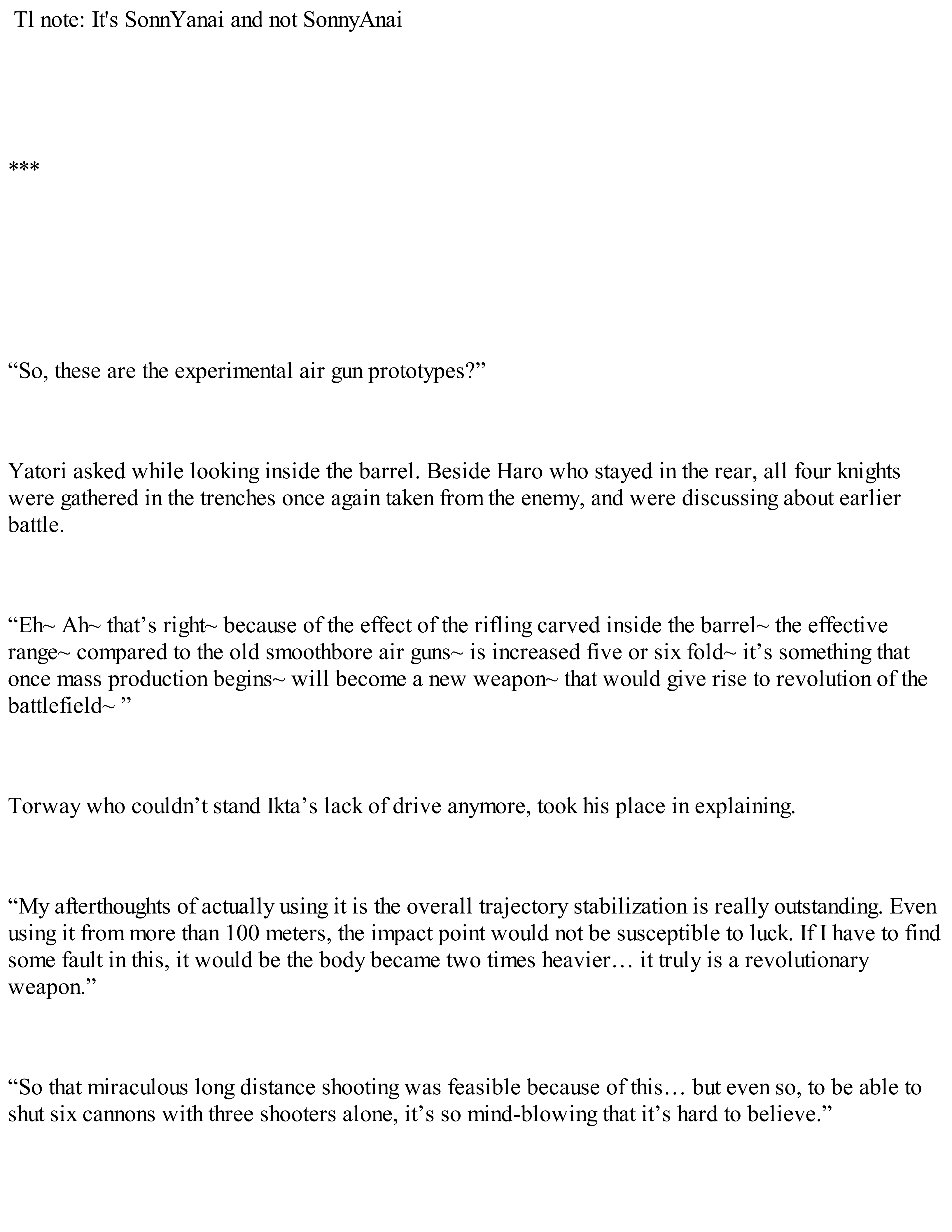
The tone suddenly changed to a gentle one. Pakda who was feeling dejected, lifted his head with surprise only to see a slight smile on the rarely relaxed face of the superior.

“You can point the troops and the commander… Right, write it on the blackboard over there, I will go later to confirm it, although we have to consider the numbers of the unit first, but as soon as we scrap together enough pieces, the first shipment will be to them.”

“–T-Thank you so much!”

Filled with gratefulness, Pakda with the most respectful salute replied to the superior who reverted to his default conduct…But then again, he had totally forgot– forgot that he was originally still hesitating whether or not to reveal the true identity of the author to that blueprint.

Due to this grave forgetfulness, the top military innovation in the empire’s history become entirely his credit. Henceforth, the innovating exploit of “Replacing the old smooth-bore air guns with rifling air gun which would become the new main weapon” will forever be associated together with the name of Pakda Sonnyanai.


Tl note: It's SonnYanai and not SonnyAnai

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“So, these are the experimental air gun prototypes?”

Yatori asked while looking inside the barrel. Beside Haro who stayed in the rear, all four knights were gathered in the trenches once again taken from the enemy, and were discussing about earlier battle.

“Eh~ Ah~ that’s right~ because of the effect of the rifling carved inside the barrel~ the effective range~ compared to the old smoothbore air guns~ is increased five or six fold~ it’s something that once mass production begins~ will become a new weapon~ that would give rise to revolution of the battlefield~ ”

Torway who couldn’t stand Ikta’s lack of drive anymore, took his place in explaining.

“My afterthoughts of actually using it is the overall trajectory stabilization is really outstanding. Even using it from more than 100 meters, the impact point would not be susceptible to luck. If I have to find some fault in this, it would be the body became two times heavier… it truly is a revolutionary weapon.”

“So that miraculous long distance shooting was feasible because of this… but even so, to be able to shut six cannons with three shooters alone, it’s so mind-blowing that it’s hard to believe.”

Matthew pondered with his hands folded on his chest, Torway instead calmly shook his head.

“This was the inevitable result since the effective shooting rage was increased so dramatically. The average rate of fire of wind mortars is one shell per forty seconds, compared to that the air guns’ is one round every five second. So in the time the enemy shoots one shell, we could have shot twelve. Since we had such a big margin on time, taking care of the artillery soldiers before the cannon was loaded is completely feasible.”

Although Torway kept it very simple, Matthew was grinding his teeth while thinking… Even with the same equipment, the present him wouldn’t be able to archieve that. It was precisely because all the shooters had proficient shooting technique that this result could be reached.

“Is this one of the technology hidden in <Anarai’s box>? Even if I heard it from Ikta before, but seeing the actual thing, it’s feels really different. The Empire ceded the important person to Kioka huh… No, it would be more correct to say the dreadful person.”

“Yeah~ but you don’t have to worry about that. For example, it could be seen from the matter of Empire manufacturing the rifling air guns, old man Anarai don’t want military progress to favor any one country. Regarding the disclosure of new technology, that old man upheld the doctrine of passive equilibrium.”

Ikta said so while yawning. Right then Yatori showed an expression as if she thought of something.

“……I say, Ikta. I remember that when we were about to come to the northern region, during the ballistic lecture you insisted on giving a speech about the need to popularize other new technology different from air guns right?”

“Oh, you mean the blast cannon*? Since Kioka has already implemented them, based on that if we see it with the perspective of ‘Technologies the empire need to develop as soon as possible’, blast cannon and rifled air guns can be said to be at exactly the same level. However, the cannon uses the same principle of ‘rising air’ as in blimps which would come in conflict with the Alderah teachings. On that alone, we couldn’t even shield ourselves from the covering fire…. forget it, it’s not something we can do about even if we were to vex over it.”

Tl note: Ikta says 爆砲 (ばくほう), literally 'exploding/explosion cannon' and my guess is he means the canonic cannon powered by explosion and does not use spirits, the rising air he cited is the same of the one in V1Ch2 (hydrogen and helium) which is highly inflammable

With a snort Ikta changed mood and moved his sight on Torway.

“Oi, Ikemen. The actual combat show has ended, isn’t it about time you tell us your plans?”

“Ah– Yeah, that’s right, there’s no more reason to keeping it secret.”

Torway, as if he was woken up, started his explanation to all present: “With the help of this rifled air gun, in the future the foothold position of air shooters should be able to advance to the next stage. First, in the foreseeable future there would be no more need to have large numbers of soldiers to compensate for the low hit rate, I think the current base unit will be replaced by squads* and spread opportunistic maneuver will substitute in as basic tactic, at least the scenario of shooting at each other on plains will lessen.”

Tl note:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squad

“You mean hiding and sneakily shooting enemies will become mainstream? Although I understand the reasoning, but it’s not a vision of the future I really want to welcome.”

The corner of Yatori’s mouth twisted, this feeling was really consistent with her style and identity of ‘White arm* Igsem’

Tl note:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_weapon

“No, no, Yatori, I think it will depend on which perspective you look at it. After all the infantry motto to date is ‘Keep shooting even if the comrade on your side were to fall’. If we talk about it, that too is a really nasty scenario isn’t it?”



“Hahaha…. perhaps both are just about the same, but humans cannot resist the trend of the times. From the standpoint of a commander of air shooter troops, we first have to adapt to the tactics of the new era, and if the opportunity arises, also promote development. In order to archieve this goal, I thought of establishing a new type of unit called ‘Sniper'”

The substantive that was never heard before aroused the interest of all. The situation was leaving Torway a bit nervous and just as he was about to open mouth and keep explaining– Suuya frantically rushed into the trench.

” I deeply apologize for interrupting your conversation but since the Lieutenant is not present…. Report! A messenger has just arrived from the frontline ahead of here and is asking for rescue!”

Yatori stood up first, her long flaming red hair was swinging and the red eyes shining of fighting spirit.

“Asking for rescue? It sounds to be a very dire situation, call the messenger here.”

“I think he will arrive shortly, however he looked like to be deeply wounded… ah, he is here!”

After clearing the way, another soldier dragging his feel stepped in. His military uniform was stained red by the blood, furthermore there was a crossbow arrow stuck in his right thigh. It’s because of the contraction of the muscle that it couldn’t be extracted huh? Just thinking of this unimaginable tragic appearance made the atmosphere become very heavy.

“…I’m officer Higasoz and I belong to the first Shinaak punitive brigade, thirty second air shooter platoon.”

“You did a great job bringing the message even when suffering from such deep wounds. Please sit on this chair and try to relax, I will immediately call for medic–”

“Thank you for your concern, but time is precious, please first allow me to give the report.”

Officer Higasoz first inspired deeply many time to readjust his disordered breathing and then again opened mouth:

“Our base one day by foot away from here is surrounded by enemies and is currently at risk of falling completely. I think everybody can understand from my appearance alone, just getting a messenger through cost the lives of many soldiers. As things are now, there is no time to hesitate, please send reinforcement as soon as possible… Guh…!”

Right then officer Higasoz, as if he couldn’t bear with a headache, lowered his head, after struggling and groaning on the ground like an animal he finally lost consciousness and lied motionless face to the ground. Ikta while telling Suuya to get a medic, kept a severe expression from beginning to end while looking at the condition of the officer.

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The soldiers understood they were in a desperate situation only after the situation was already irreversible.

“Fire!”

Following the anxious order of the commander, the soldiers embattled at the top of the high platform opened fire. Although the target was the swarm of enemies below blocking them, the result was lacking. The reason being the enemy keeping distance at the edge of not suffering serious damage from

air gun volleys.

“Lieutenant, this way we can’t have a winner! Before our ammunitions runs out we need to break through their encirclement…!”

Although the reasoning of the adjutant was correct, after hesitating, Lieutenant Bellary, the acting commander dejected the proposal. The tragedy he witnessed just a few hours earlier made his heart waver in implementing a breakthrough.

“…. Dismissed! You too should have seen the fate of our comrades who just did that!”

Besieged on all sides, this was the simplest way to describe their current situation.

Around this high ground field base occupied by four empire platoons, were enemies in the lowlands on all four sides deploying an inclusive formation. Even if their troops already outnumbered the empire soldiers, the enemy didn’t make the initiative to attack. They only occasionally exhibited the will to charge in, increasing psychological pressure and basically maintained the encircled status. Moreover, that was already enough.

“But they are waiting for us to exhaust our ammunition! …furthermore in the meantime the supply chain to the frontline has been cut…!”

Interrupt the supply chain, and one after another eliminate the weakened enemy which stopped receiving support from the rear–this was the Shinaak tribe’s tactic. To archieve this goal, they didn’t necessarily need to defeat the enemy, it could be done as long as the enemy doesn’t march out of the relay station. This not only blocks supply to the frontlines, but also makes the surrounded bases gradually get consumed in the isolated battle. Just like the predicament Lieutenant Bellary’s troops has fallen into.

Being on high ground had advantages over the enemies in the lowlands, this was the common sense Lieutenant Bellary had learned in military commanding. Because from a higher elevation they had

good visual on the enemy, thus it made easy to react whatever action they should take; And if they were to charge into them, running down the slope would create momentum making it become power.

However, he carelessly forgot, forgot that the place his troops were battling was not a single tower rising on a plain, but in a part of unique mountain area rich of undulating terrain. He also forgot that even if he wanted to break through with a charge, after that, awaiting for them was a steep terrain unsuitable for a smooth march.

In contrast, the Shinaak tribe warriors understood that very well. Which is why when the Empire soldiers charged down from the high platform they didn’t confront them frontally, instead they let the enemy pass through first. Waiting for the moment of hesitation the enemy showed when they reached the dangerous terrain formation, and then they presented their fangs. Followed by impeccable preparations, they mercilessly devoured the unprepared backs.

“Even if we can break through this encirclement, the following terrain will not allow a safe retreat… Now that I think about it, an abandoned high ground base was obliviously a trap, not catching on it was my mistake.”

“Lieutenant……”

“Strengthen your will, Sargent Ikshini. It seems we can only fight a protracted battle”

Waiting for a judgemental error from the enemy, or the arrival of allied reinforcement, since they already lost the retreat route, Lieutenant Bellary was psychologically prepared for a complete siege battle.

On the other hand, Lance corporal Kanna Temari who was at the same base and responsible of engaging the enemy felt fear from the indeed approaching ambiance of ruin.

Since the moment she saw the surrounding terrain she had this unjustifiable ominous presentiment. However, Kanna was unable to poke deeper into her intuition until the feelings became truth. As an

infantry she never had the education to effectively capitalize onto those feelings.

“Squad leader! The range of air guns are not enough…! We still can’t use the wind mortars?”

“We can’t! Mortar shells are even more scarce than bullets! If we waste them now, we would have no means to fight off the enemy in the event they launch an offensive! If we use it, it will be by taking advantage of when they rush to determine the outcome and get careless, that’s our only chance to deal a major blow to the enemy….”

Although he said so himself, watching his attitude, the squad leader wasn’t really keen on the probability of that event. Probably because he thought that the enemy who devised such a thoughtful approach to the offensive wouldn’t commit a last moment mistake right? Kanna also felt the same.

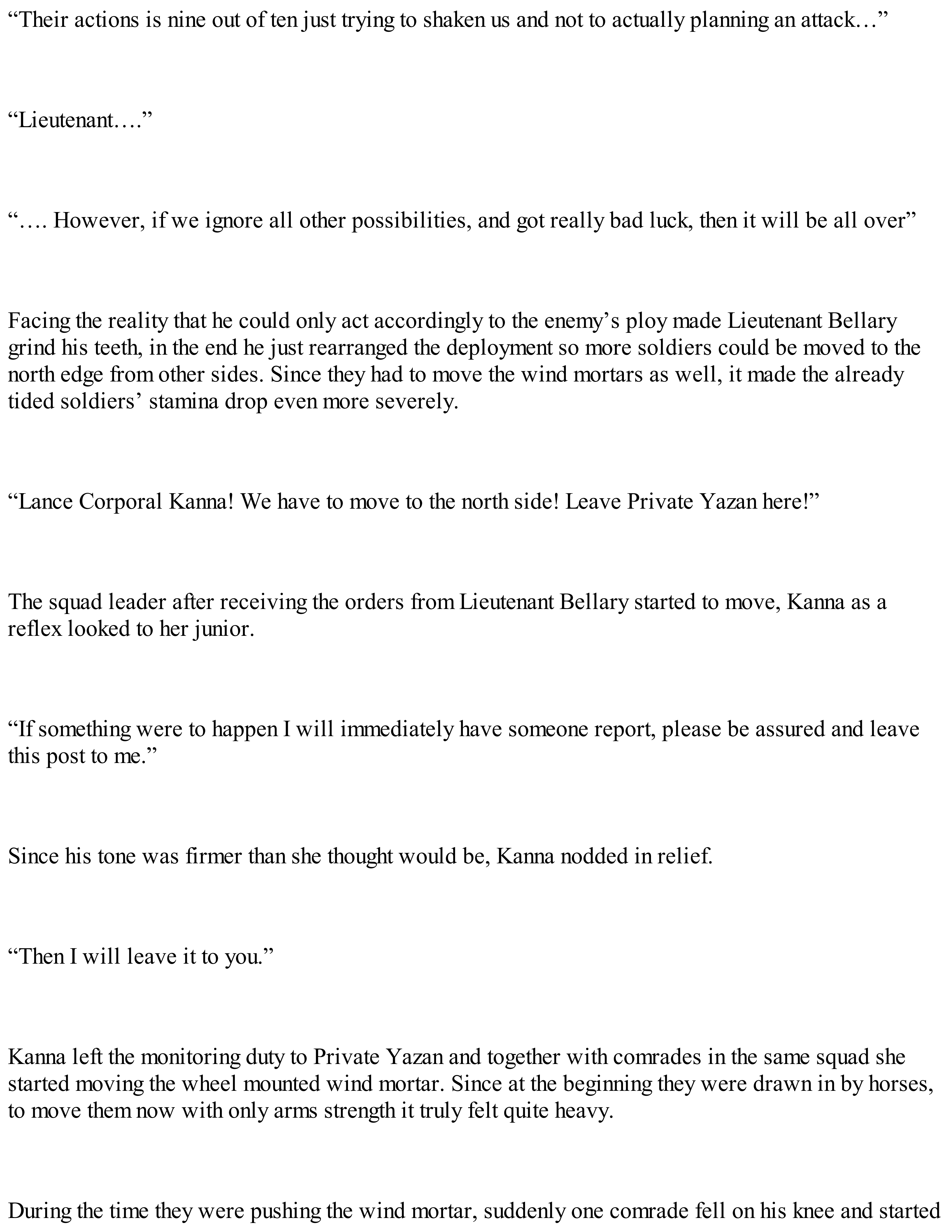
“…Ugh…Then, we have to keep shooting knowing it won’t hit?”

“No, this is a pre-combat operation. If we insist in not using mortar shells, the enemy may suspect we no longer have them. If it was like that the enemy might decide on a charging attack, I think the Lieutenant is counting on that advantage to deal substantial damage to the enemy.”

Kanna moved her focus onto the wind mortars to make sure if ordered, she would be able to immediately go operate it…. Because if they couldn’t just stay put and wait for reinforcement, this tactic would be their last mean to break the status quo.

“Report! The enemy units begun to gather to the north! It’s possible they could directly go on offensive after gathering!”

The scout situated on the northern side of the base, responsible for monitoring enemy’s movement shouted with high volume. The one in command, Lieutenant Bellary, after hearing the report, with a face full of hatred crooked the corners of his mouth.


“Their actions is nine out of ten just trying to shaken us and not to actually planning an attack…”

“Lieutenant….”

“…. However, if we ignore all other possibilities, and got really bad luck, then it will be all over”

Facing the reality that he could only act accordingly to the enemy’s ploy made Lieutenant Bellary grind his teeth, in the end he just rearranged the deployment so more soldiers could be moved to the north edge from other sides. Since they had to move the wind mortars as well, it made the already tided soldiers’ stamina drop even more severely.

“Lance Corporal Kanna! We have to move to the north side! Leave Private Yazan here!”

The squad leader after receiving the orders from Lieutenant Bellary started to move, Kanna as a reflex looked to her junior.

“If something were to happen I will immediately have someone report, please be assured and leave this post to me.”

Since his tone was firmer than she thought would be, Kanna nodded in relief.

“Then I will leave it to you.”

Kanna left the monitoring duty to Private Yazan and together with comrades in the same squad she started moving the wheel mounted wind mortar. Since at the beginning they were drawn in by horses, to move them now with only arms strength it truly felt quite heavy.

During the time they were pushing the wind mortar, suddenly one comrade fell on his knee and started

vomiting followed by another who felt dizzy and sat on the ground.

“Hey! What happened? Pull yourselves together! Quickly push the mortar…!”

Although the squad leader was shouting anxiously, Kanna inadvertently looked around and found–this was not a phenomenon happening only in her squad, but all squads had members suffering from poor health. No, not only that–

“…. When did everybody become so thin…?”

Kanna was rendered speechless. The face complexion could not be called livid anymore but white pale, their skin was dry and cracked, the meager cheeks sunken. Under sunlight doesn’t everybody look like a diseased?

Of course Kanna too was quite tired because of this war lifestyle but she had yet to incur in serious health issues. As things are now, she finally was aware that she was quite lucky. As everyone were become like that, her companion just didn’t escape from that rule.

While Kanna felt a shiver ran down her spine because of noticing this, in another area, Private Yazan who was left to monitoring the west field also experienced and abnormal situation. But he did not believe this abnormal situation was originated from himself.

“….it clearly is daytime then why is it so dark? Did clouds cover the sun…?”

Private Yazan murmured so while under a blue sky with no cloud in sight. In truth the world seen through his eyes indeed appeared to be dim. Furthermore, his symptoms of headache, tinnitus* and nausea also worsened, but he no longer was in the condition to determine these symptoms were all chained together by one condition.

Tl note:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinnitus

The task of monitoring the west side was of course not left to him alone, each squad left one person in charge for the same job. Although it was not ordered by the commander, the personnel choice was based on 'those with not much stamina left'. In other words, although the enemy's action must be corresponded by having soldiers running around the base, or pushing the mobile heavy wind mortar—to be excluded from that one had to reach the point of being the weakest soldiers among all.

Not counting him, around Private Yazan were four other soldiers. Some directly lost consciousness while leaning on the wall of the fort; others knelt and threw up whatever was in their stomach; there were even some who started humming because of confusion…. the common trait between them was that they did not have the strength to correctly grasp the reality in front of them anymore

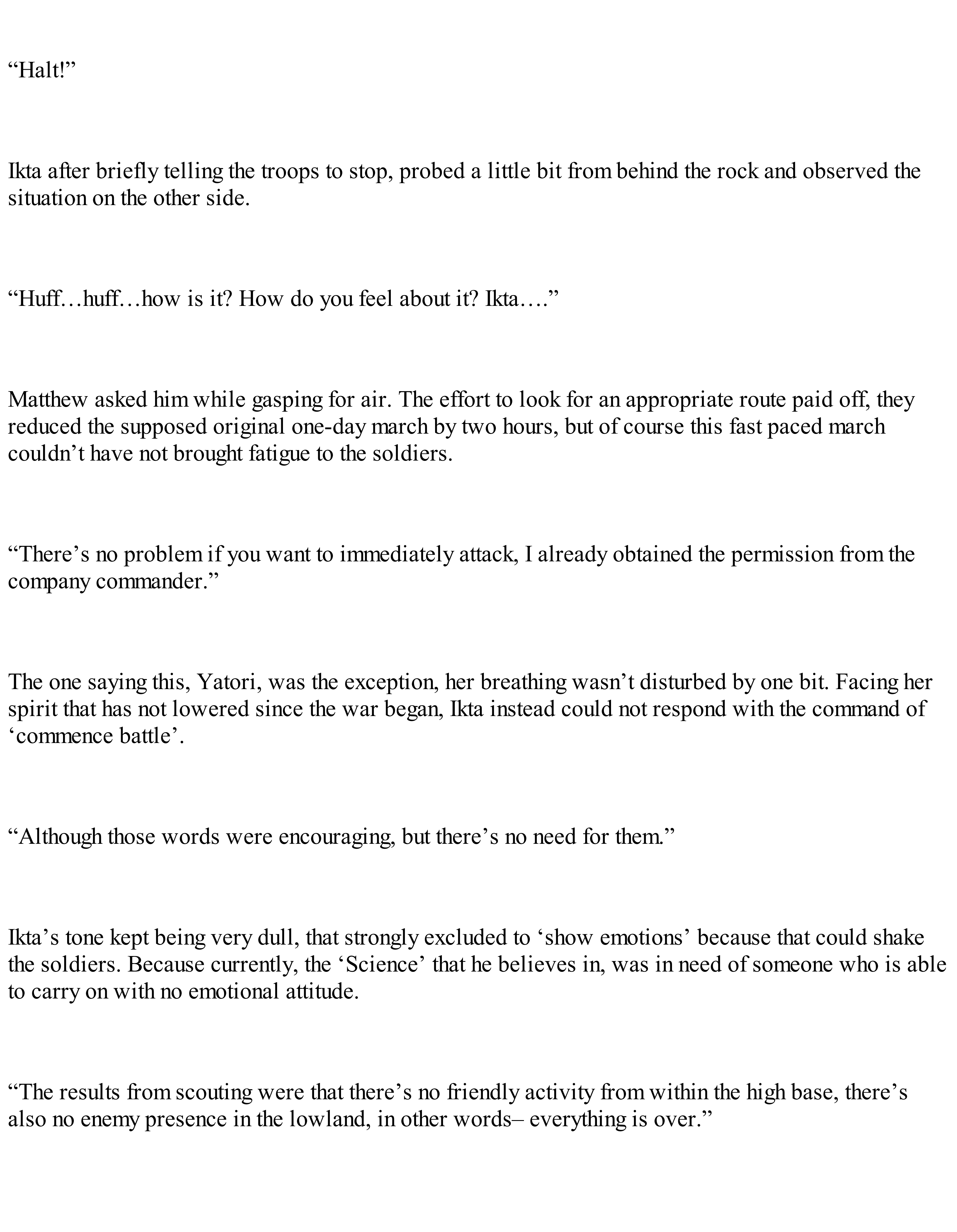
"–Huh…"

In the scenario of him not being able to stop his mind from wandering off, the world slowly devoid of light and even color shown by Private Yazan's eyes, a fuzzy black silhouette appeared. The perception crisis did not kick in. He was already unclear of where he was or what situation he was in.

"…Who…are you?"

Even till the moment that arm swung down bringing down a certain く shaped object, Private Yazan offered no resistance at all.

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“Halt!”

Ikta after briefly telling the troops to stop, probed a little bit from behind the rock and observed the situation on the other side.

“Huff…huff…how is it? How do you feel about it? Ikta….”

Matthew asked him while gasping for air. The effort to look for an appropriate route paid off, they reduced the supposed original one-day march by two hours, but of course this fast paced march couldn’t have not brought fatigue to the soldiers.

“There’s no problem if you want to immediately attack, I already obtained the permission from the company commander.”

The one saying this, Yatori, was the exception, her breathing wasn’t disturbed by one bit. Facing her spirit that has not lowered since the war began, Ikta instead could not respond with the command of ‘commence battle’.

“Although those words were encouraging, but there’s no need for them.”

Ikta’s tone kept being very dull, that strongly excluded to ‘show emotions’ because that could shake the soldiers. Because currently, the ‘Science’ that he believes in, was in need of someone who is able to carry on with no emotional attitude.

“The results from scouting were that there’s no friendly activity from within the high base, there’s also no enemy presence in the lowland, in other words– everything is over.”



“We will not proceed with the rescue. For at least the next two days the troops will not move from here”

After entrusting the fainted officer Higasoz to the medic unit and ordering them to send the officer to the rear, Ikta, still keeping a dull tone, told his heartless plan to the companions.

“…. Huh…? Ikkun, what did you just say….”

“I said we will not be going to rescue them. More correctly is we have no means.”

Facing Ikta who made such a cold assertion, of the present, only Yatori could immediately understand his intention. Matthew, Torway and Suuya were focusing the line of sigh mixed with surprise and reproach on him.

“Hey! What’s the meaning of this Ikta! To say we have no mean to rescue them, but we don’t even have a clear understanding of the situation on the other side right? Don’t give up before even knowing the enemy’s numbers!”

“Platoon leader, please let’s go help them at once! The soldiers’ stamina is not an issue!”

Ikta while facing them and frontally bearing their blame said:

“The issue is not manpower, Matthew; and not stamina as well, Suuya. It’s because of other reasons, unless we stay here and prepare for two days first, otherwise we would be incapable of keep moving higher onto the mountain.”

The three showed an expression as if they couldn’t accept it, suddenly then Yatori decided to point to the heart of the issue.

"…it's to adapt to the altitude right?"

Hearing those words, Ikta closed his eyes and confirmed. The trio stared at him with strong puzzled looks.

"Although I believe nobody has forgot this, but right now we are engaging battle on the Grand Arfatra Mountain range, compared to the altitude we are used to live, the elevation we are risking our lives at is different as day and night… Then if we want to do such whimsical act, then we have to comply to the rules of the highlands."

"Rules of the highland…Ikkun, you mean…?"

"First, you can't suddenly increase the elevation in a short amount of time, especially after reaching 3000 meters– although there are other rules, but currently the main reason for our inability to immediately go on a rescue mission is this."

After estimating when Ikta would finish speaking, Yatori temporally substituted him in explaining.

"I think everyone has experienced this, the more you go up on the mountain, the harder it is to breath. It is said that it's because compared to the plain the air on the mountain is thinner. Then after reaching the highlands the people who used to live on the plain like us will be affected by a series of symptoms caused by the thin air. Including headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, insomnia, swollen limbs, chest tightness and so on– together these are called 'Mountain sickness'"

"If we neglect on the signs the body shows us and keep climbing, then our condition will worsen. Other than the more severe symptoms of what Yatori has said, you will show inability to walk straight, see visual and hear auditory hallucinations, narrowing and darkening of the field of view and others. If you were to lose consciousness, then that mean you are almost dead…So how are you guys feeling about this? Although I admit that I had taken this issue into consideration as far as I could, but showing early symptoms of headache, nausea and chest tightness is also a normal phenomenon."

Matthew and Suuya immediately pressed their chest. Ikta looking at their actions continued:

“Professor Anarai collectively referred to these symptoms as ‘Altitude sickness*’, it’s a hazardous trap lying in the mountains. The iron rule I was taught about climbing is first avoid to fall into this trap. To archieve that the essential step is just as Yatori has mentioned at the beginning ‘Acclimate to the elevation'”

Tl note:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altitude_sickness

“……Acclimate to the elevation….”

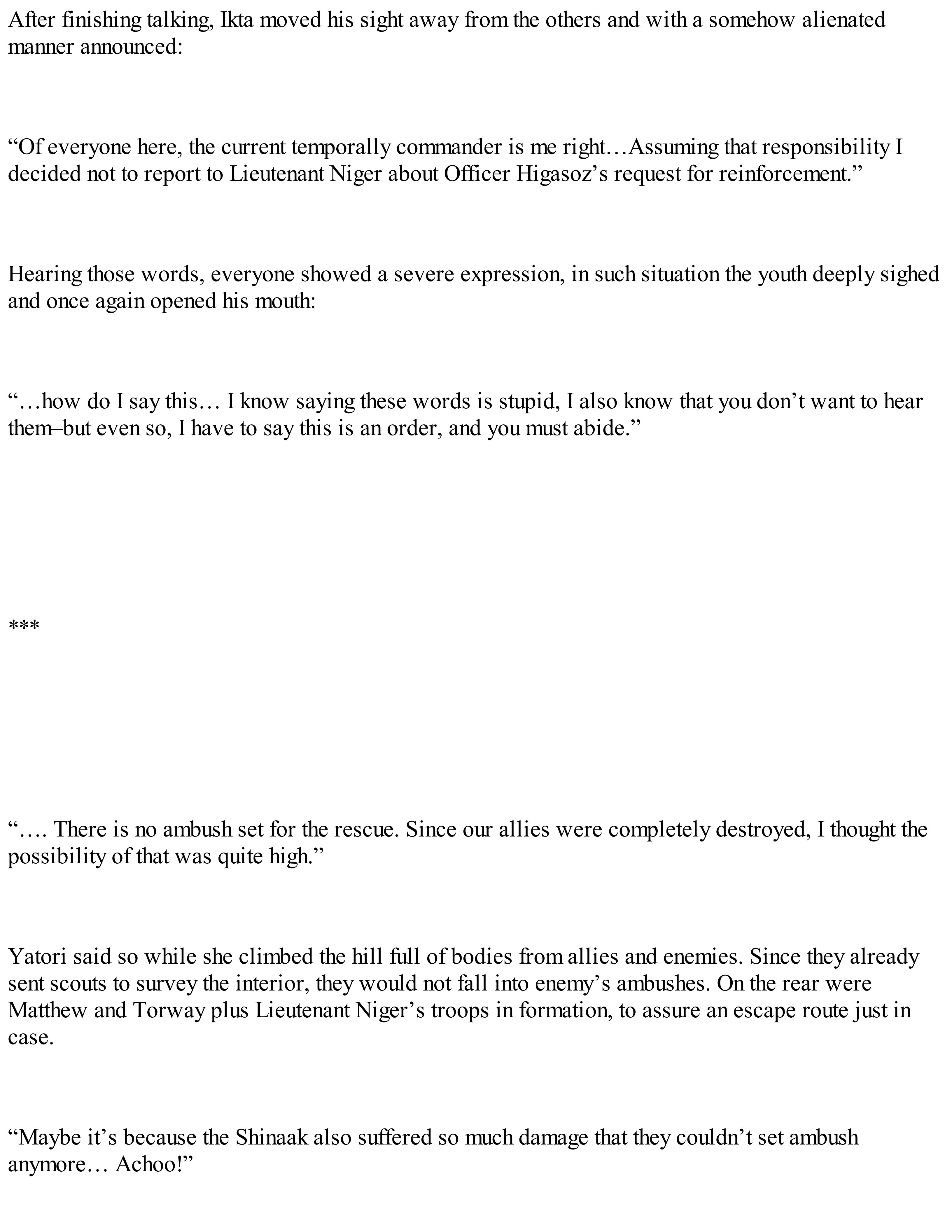
“Correct, just as it literally says it makes the body adapt to the elevation, at least till the symptoms of ‘mountain sickness’ no longer appears. When you are over 3000 meters if something like this is not done, it could be fatal. Incidentally the place we are right now is a lot higher than that benchmark.”

“In other words, it’s to let our bodies adapt to the altitude that for two days we can’t move from here…?”

“Right. There’s risk in climbing alone, if you also want to fight then it’s just looking for death. If you have to agonistically strain your body before it adapts, it will suddenly make the altitude sickness effects a lot worse. What do you think will be the fate of increasingly weak soldiers when facing enemies in battles?”

No one else raised objections, because the result was too easily imaginable.

“Based on the aforementioned, the earliest time we can go on a rescue mission is two days from now, in that time we must do our best and adapt to the altitude. The specific method is to drink twice the average amount of fluids and urinate a lot, while breathing pay attention to do deep abdominal inspiration and while sleeping be careful to keep your body warm and not expose it to the cold.”



After finishing talking, Ikta moved his sight away from the others and with a somehow alienated manner announced:

“Of everyone here, the current temporally commander is me right…Assuming that responsibility I decided not to report to Lieutenant Niger about Officer Higasoz’s request for reinforcement.”

Hearing those words, everyone showed a severe expression, in such situation the youth deeply sighed and once again opened his mouth:

“…how do I say this… I know saying these words is stupid, I also know that you don’t want to hear them–but even so, I have to say this is an order, and you must abide.”

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“…. There is no ambush set for the rescue. Since our allies were completely destroyed, I thought the possibility of that was quite high.”

Yatori said so while she climbed the hill full of bodies from allies and enemies. Since they already sent scouts to survey the interior, they would not fall into enemy’s ambushes. On the rear were Matthew and Torway plus Lieutenant Niger’s troops in formation, to assure an escape route just in case.

“Maybe it’s because the Shinaak also suffered so much damage that they couldn’t set ambush anymore… Achoo!”

Following the sneeze, Ikta stepped onto the high platform– that is where the field base was set. He stopped his feet in the middle of the base and looked around. Yatori who was late by one beat, caught up and showed a stiff expression to the spectacle in her eyes.

Right now the base was filled with the silence of over one hundred casualties from the four platoon and dozens of enemies. The freezing and dryness typical to highlands preserved the bodies from decomposition, those who fell in battle, those who perished in panic, and also those who lost their lives without even realizing it…the way of death was different for everyone. From their body posture and location, one could deduce their last moments as well as how they were trying to fight the inevitable.

"…Although painful but the choice you face might be forced on the battlefield, like whether or not to go and help your companions. Which means you first have to put on the scale and balance the risk and chances of success, then decide whether you will join the battle…"

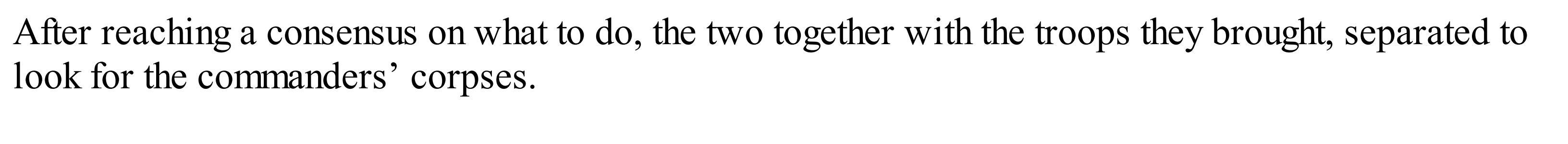
Yatori murmured so, it was rare to see her show the conflict in her heart.

"The majority of the bodies are within the base, it seems till the end they didn't try the strategy of gathering all troops and trying to break through the encirclement."

Till the last moment of the last man standing, did they believe the reinforcement would arrive and waited? Ikta was convinced that not bringing Matthew and Torway here was the correct decision.

"…However, although we have arrived here, there is almost nothing we can recover. The spirits were all taken away, and at the current stage, even if we wanted to carry the bodies we wouldn't be able to do it."

"Let's collect the tags of commanders who fell in battle and then withdraw."


After reaching a consensus on what to do, the two together with the troops they brought, separated to look for the commanders' corpses.

Ikta moved to the eastern side of the base–while inspecting this zone of the fort, the image two bodies stacked on each other entered his vision.

Just as Ikta was about to inadvertently pass on the sides, a sudden gust of wind made the loosened ribbon from the hair of one body entangled in his feet. However, just as the youth was about to reach and remove the ribbon–a sense of familiarity he didn't want to feel swarmed his mind.

"…Guh–"

The brown ribbon was stained with marks of the owner's blood. Ikta still remembered this color and this plainness, remembered the unremarkable decoration on the ponytail, and also remembered it being the only cute part of that girl's dressing–

"Why it had to be…"



This moment he could not help but whisper those words as his actions were already involuntary. That's why Ikta closed his mouth and as if it wasn't enough he held his breath too.

When he finally managed to get his self-control back, he slowly moved his sight on the two bodies again…The first to have perished should be the male soldier below her. The girl was in a supine position that covered the body of the male soldier, her body was lacerated with countless stab wounds; furthermore, her still held an air gun with the bayonet equipped–You could understand with a glance that her life ended when she wanted to protect a companion.

"I had since met you twice."

His self-restrain begun to crack and his tightly closed lips softened. The words that shouldn't be said poured out of Ikta's heart.

"I always, had been looking forward to our third meeting–"

This was a meaningless confession, for him to be a follower of science those were empty words that should not have been said.

"–…. Kuh………Good bye, Kanna."

As if he was swinging down a hatchet, with those words Ikta bid farewell and cut off his current inexcusably disgraceful appearance… As if sensing the time was ripe, a gust of wind took the ribbon in his hand away. The youth did not try to catch the object that was flying far away, he turned his back and walked past.

Chapter 4: Leaving with a Modest Reputation

“Platoon Yatori, begin scorch attack.”

The sound of air flowing started after the unemotional voice ended. The houses were using wood and mud-bricks as building material with plenty of dry straw used in roofing, there was also storages full of dried corns–these symbols of human settlement were one after another pierced by countless incandescent burning arrows.

“Platoon Torway, Platoon Matthew, blow wind to help with the combustion, make the fire propagate to the west.”

Air gunner troops’ wind spirit begun sending fresh air toward the burning houses. The fueled flames immediately invigorated burning in the direction led by the wind. The first building collapsed followed by a second one, soon after most of building in sight range were burned down.

A village became scorched earth. The reason being the fire arrows fired by Yatori’s incineration unit; the wind supplied by Torway and Matthew’s air gunner units; and the orders Ikta gave that made them do all this.

“Not being satisfied with looting and murdering and finally resorted to burn everything down… You truly are devils!”

The village was gradually burned down, cursing words continuously came from the mouths of women who, despite being terrified, stood out, and children hiding behind the back of the village chief…. their assessment truly is regrettable, Ikta thought. Murder, plunder, arson, these clearly are not devil’s but human specialties.

“Ah〜please just wait a little bit longer. Once we extinguish the fire we will escort everyone to the western settlement.”

Hearing the voice of Ikta who used a tone like doing some boring chores made insults come one after another from the mouths of villagers who lost their home to the flames. Ikta decided to ignore them, as long as he is not totally looked down upon, then let the villagers say whatever they want. After all, this was a good way to vent anger, furthermore, as the insults from the villagers became worse and worse, the soldiers’ guilt also decreased.

However, the one thing he didn’t know how to deal with was infant cries. This stimulus, obstinately poking at the soldiers’ conscience, together with the curses was incessant from beginning till now.

“Ah〜so noisy…. there shouldn’t be any ear plugs in Anarai’s box that only block infants’ cries right? If classified as military technology wouldn’t its use, be simply ‘Defense equipment for conscience’?”

Ikta half-jokingly, half in earnest, said so. Conscience– speaking of which, this is something that is

most difficult to keep on the battlefield.

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"–Warrant Officer Ikta!? Also the Igsem's Jou-chan and Remeon's handsome…. wait, why are you guys here?"

After joining forces with Haro's unit, while repeating the altitude adaptation and reaching an elevation of 3800 meters, an unexpected fateful reunion was waiting for them. The Lieutenant Senpa Sazaruf who was their instructor when they just came to the northern region, apparently had first reached the frontline.

They were lead into the tent that functioned as headquarters, here everybody sat on normal chairs they haven't seen for a while. On the chin of Lieutenant Sazaruf who greeted them, was an unkempt beard that had reached a length it could no longer be distinguished from stubbles.

"There's no specific reason. Each time we finished the delivery mission we were pushed forward and forward, without noticing it, we got here."

"No no no…. what forward are ya talking, we are almost at the forefront. And your units were designated to be reserves at the beginning of the war no? I had news about you guys doing some support missions from the rear, but……"

What went wrong in the middle that got you here? The Lieutenant's eyes asked this. Of course nobody could answer that, even more, they themselves wanted to know the answer.

"It's because, huh…. at first there were also other cadets, but in the middle of it they gave up one after another…."

"No one received mountain warfare training, that result was also granted. Even we don't know what ending we would have reached if we didn't get Ikkun's instructions……"

Matthew and Torway were whispering such conversation. Lieutenant Sazaruf was at first surprised for quite a long while, then regaining his composure, faced at these unexpected reinforcements with a face showing 'how should I deal with this?' expression.

"…. How damaged are the troops? The total number of personnel and soldiers capable of fighting are?"

"We have sent to the rear twenty-four injured from the five Platoons. While it will not affect combat operations, but Warrant Officer Matthew's air gunner unit is missing nine men, it has the biggest vacancies. So if possible we would like to replenish the manpower before the next operation."

"You only received this degree of damage…Also it seems that before getting here you swapped multiple instructors? Each time you had the handover it should have been chaotic, at those time who

was responsible of reorganize the group?”

“It was me, right now I am also speaking as the temporary commander of all troops.”

Ikta answered clearly. In doing so he didn’t try to muddle, nor was he humble, it was because of the necessity first identifying who would be responsible of all their actions to date.

Lieutenant Sazaruf did not just take everything as told, instead he, as if nothing happened, carefully observed the expression of everyone present. However, hearing Ikta state his status as commander did not cause disapproval or antipathy like connotations from the others. It seems it was appropriate to consider his words not lies or exaggerations.

“….Warrant Officer Yatorishino. I ask you, why did you leave the command right in the hands of Warrant Officer Ikta?”

“Yes sir. It was because at that stage, I believed it was the most efficient way of mobilizing manpower.”

“Even more effective than having you commanding?”

“My unit is the only cavalry unit. The responsibility of directing everything would limit my actions, making it impossible to fully utilize the original cavalry power. Based on that, I think the decision of handing the commanding right to Warrant Officer Ikta was correct.”

When explaining, Yatori didn’t mention the merit of them both having command right, she just pointed out the result of using the right man for the right job. Ikta’s expression also hinted that’s how things were, thus Lieutenant Sazaruf nodded his head. There, Haro tried to change the topic.

“–About that, Lieutenant.”

“Eh? I haven’t told you yet? Actually I am now a Captain, Warrant Officer Haroma. The reason being the previous commander perished for a stab wound. However, this is not an official promotion but a temporary appointment.”

“Ah, is that so. Then Captain… If it is convenient, can you tell us the current situation of the war?”

“Ohho, normally of course I wouldn’t divulge that. Well, you guys come here.”

Captain Sazaruf who was promoted from Lieutenant, straightforwardly accepted the request, got up and turned to the table situated directly behind him. The five also followed his actions.

“Although it was much more slower than expected, however the war has finally reached its final stage. The three Shinaak tribe punitive brigades, using different paths to infiltrate deep into the mountain has successfully rendezvoused at the plateau ahead of here. However, because each army had, during the long journey, many stragglers, the military strength after joining forces probably does

not reach ten thousands."

Exactly as the Captain has said, drew on the rectangular map of Grand Arfatra Mountain range, cutting in from the southern foothills, were three march routes. In order to prevent information leakage to the enemy, this was intelligence only told to military officers of the frontlines and central headquarters at the base. This was also the first time the five saw something like this…

"…Ehm Captain Sazaruf. May I ask some questions…?"

"If your questions are criticism to the foundation of this operation, then spare me from it, Warrant Officer Torway. Because there is no point in talking about that now."

Although Captain Sazaruf tried to stop Torway's questioning before it even started, but his face clearly shows how he has given up on that matter. No matter how dissatisfied they were about the content, they who are on the frontline are not in the position to change the strategy itself. Go do this, go do that– they could only within the range of their orders do their best, thus this result was already their best efforts.

"Since you especially came here, then there will be a lot of work you guys will be responsible for. But rest assured, I won't require you to fight on the frontline with us, your work will have safety as condition."

If it truly was like that, then it deserves my thanks–Ikta frankly thought so. It was so long since he last met a instructor willing to consider the training troops commanded by a greenhorn Warrant Officer would be immature…Although right now he wasn't really sure how reliable would this instructor be.

"However, because of that condition, it will be unpleasant jobs. About this you can only think about it as gaining experience and obediently give up…Yeah, although the scale is pretty small, but it's perfect, I will combine your five Platoons and regard it as a company. If you all still do not mind Ikta being the commander then congratulations, from this moment you became a company commander."

Tl note: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_commander

"…Oh, I understand. Then, specifically speaking, what should we do?"

Ikta asked while stretching his body, Captain Sazaruf after very deliberately revealing a smile, answered:

"First you simply have to lit a campfire, then you'll have to lead groups of guests. Please don't lose the the guests' complaints."

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"It seems that I can't help but admit my evaluation of Captain Sazaruf was too low, especially his superb sense of humor to call burning down villages a campfire."

Ikta set up a configuration with soldiers in front and behind where the residents of the burned village is encircled and lead on the road to other villages. After reaching this elevation, the tall trees appeared less and less, the surrounding scenery, especially the mountain road can be said to look more like rugged rocky ground.

"However, this kind of order is still fairly good… if we were to compare it with one that required us to kill the villagers."

Suuya, visualizing herself executing that kind of order, shook her shoulders, the others' feeling were also the same.

To be honest, Ikta's statement that his evaluation of Captain Sazaruf had gone up was sincere. The reason was because he heard it was Captain Sazaruf who proposed the 'after burning down the Shinaak tribe's village, move the residents to other villages'–which replaced the original plan of 'kill villagers'.

"That's right, I too support this more appropriate approach compared to the original. Even if the added time and effort is inevitable, however while maintaining the purpose of cutting the enemy's supplies, I predict that in the future we might receive some complimentary gift."

Not considering the repugnance caused by the thought of 'Killing all non-combatant too' Ikta, on the strategic point of view, still had praises for the plan prosed by Captain Sazaruf. As the war has already entered its final stage, the large amount of prisoners obtained could become material to use in the final negotiation requesting for Shinaak tribe's surrender.

"However, are we choosing an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth… Lieutenant General Safida from the beginning of the rebellion till now still hasn't proposed a proactive strategy, now we are really reaching the limits of that."

What ideas the Lieutenant General had when he ordered the burning of the villages was clear as day to Ikta. He probably thought since the enemy's strategy to cut off our supply chain was so beneficial to them, then we should have done just the same to our foes. Well you can't say he was wrong, it's just not really smart.

"Since the imperial army is the one invading, the Shinaak tribe are using the main stage that is the Grand Arfatra Mountain range to play guerrilla warfare. Because they made use of the geographical familiarity and, throughout the whole mountain set up supply points with resources and personnel, something like a 'stronghold that would deal them a huge blow if taken' does not exist. The same dispersion issue the northern garrison was having a headache about, they instead used it as a weapon."

Ikta bluntly gave his positive judgement that it was a very brilliant plan… However, compared with the Shinaak tribe, Lieutenant General Safida's approach was extremely rough.

“Just as Torway wanted to point it out before, I too was dumbfounded at the sight of that map. Three brigades marched into the mountain on three routes but the distance separating each of them was more than 100Km, I heard it was because they wanted to have rendezvous at the midpoint of the mountain. In other words, before reaching the rendezvous point the three brigades totally won’t be able to give mutual assistance.”

In this war, the biggest reason for the imperial army’s bitter struggles was this. The Shinaak tribe just had to attack on all points of the isolated marching routes, if there was any point that were to collapse, it would have meant the supply chain to the frontline would be cut. And soldiers without supplies are unable to fight off enemies.

“To avoid that situation he should have set the marching routes to be close and parallel to each other. Also the supply chain shouldn’t have been a sole line, instead it should be evolved it to an interconnected pluriplanar reticular system…. This clearly was the iron rule, no matter if you were to fight on mountains or plains, Lieutenant General Safida instead didn’t pay attention to it.”

Tl note: the big words means a web like structure where it is also expanded longitudinally and not only vertically

If you were to look for them, one would find many more mistakes. For instance, there was another issue that after setting field bases on the marching route, they only ordered the soldiers to completely devote themselves to holding their post and never had the troops pay attention to means of retreat. Winning or losing a stronghold was commonplace in war, in disadvantageous situation you just had to temporally retreat and re-establish the ranks, then go recapture the stronghold.

“He did not have to be a famous general, however Lieutenant General Safida let many soldiers lose their lives in unnecessary deaths under the lead of normal generals. To make things worse, not only had the imperial army pay the price for those mistakes, this even spread to Shinaak tribe villagers who originally needn’t to be killed.”

Even now in some place at lower altitude than here, there should be villages burning. Ikta thought. Different from the plan proposed by Captain Sazaruf, over there it is complete massacre. Buildings, farmlands, livestock, and villagers– everything will be taken by the burning villages, how many of them will remain till the end?

“No matter from where I look at it, it’s unscientific, the costs and results are disproportional. This truly is a mess of a war.”

Ikta disdainfully concluded. That person, the more he was angry the more he loved to talk and argue～Suuya who was listening and experiencing this herself noticed housing appearing on the track the troops were advancing.

“Company commander, we have arrived, It’s that village.”

“It seems so. Time is precious, quickly lead in our group of guest from the rear.”

After signaling to the soldiers responsible for surveillance, Ikta, with Platoon as base unit, separated the troops and had them take care of the refugees, they then led and entered the village. After that, the villagers noticing the sound, stuck their heads out from everywhere, with fear and fright in their eyes looked at the soldiers.

This village originally accommodated 200 people. After the Imperial army took control of the area, they rapidly increased the numbers of temporary buildings and tents to create a refugee camp, and decided to accept into this place the villagers who lost their homes to the burning, which outnumbered the original population over five times.

Of course a building or tent will be shoehorned with more than ten refugees. However, in order to avoid creating the flame of dispute, they arranged as much as possible to have people with close relationship live togheter.

“Good, first of all, eight people in this house. The Sotoi family of five all inside, followed by Yam couple and the little sister Kotai.”

Ikta called out names indicating refugees and cleanly assigned them to the empty premise. For this purpose, he, before departing, had already grasped the names, appearance and relationship of the people living in villages he torched.

“You all gone inside? Good. Then next is…. Ouch!”

A stone thrown by someone hit Ikta’s thigh. Although it didn’t possess much strength, but the alert soldiers near him immediately raised their crossbows against the refugees.

“Get lost! Empire’s dogs! Hurry up and scat!”

However, the offender who cried out with a high pitched voice while picking up a second stone was a boy yet to reach 10 years old. There was no need for soldiers’ action, the nearby mother already embraced the boy stopping him.

“……….Uh…. Then next, it’s that house facing east….”

Ikta thought of considering as nothing happened and continued the job. But this made the boy even more furious, taking advantage of the moment his mother loosened her arms, he broke free and ran directly to the hated enemy of the village. This time the soldiers stepped forward to stop him, but he, using his petite figure, slipped through under their legs.

“Get lost! Go back to the plains! Give back! Give back our village!”

The boy with unfluent pronunciation desperately vented his anger and with his fists continuously hit Ikta’s thing and waist. Although a soldier got there and grabbed him, but as he tried to pull the boy away, he firmly bit his teeth to Ikta’s military pants, making the man hesitate on how he should

proceed. If he forcefully pulled the boy away, he might break his frontal teeth from the root.

Tl note: the soldier is genderless

"….Ah〜Young'un, I truly understand your reasoning. After this job is done I will immediately disappear, I promise I will disappear without a single trace so for now can you let go of me?"

Even Ikta lacked resolution when facing this situation. Although he tried to solve in a peaceful manner, however the angry child could not be persuaded. Left with no other choices, Ikta could only take compromises.

"…Awu!"

The boy's nose was hit by a sharp impact which made him unintentionally loosen his bite. The soldier immediately separated the two…this was the ultimate weapon against children, the power of a finger flick attack. The trick to add in more impact was an upward flick to the opponent's nose from below.

"……..Ah……."

The soldier brought back the boy to his parents. However, he then stretched his hand to the nose as he felt something was coming out—next, a red liquid started dripping onto the boy's palm.

Screams came from the parents, Ikta too who was watching from the sidelines was stunned.

"Wu…..WuaAaAaaaAaaAah!"

Seeing himself bleeding acted as breaking point making the boy start crying loudly. The refugees who did not know what was happening just had to turn this way, to see the figure of the loudly weeping boy with blood on his face. Between them, the worst scenario immediately ran amok–they though that young soldier would go as far brutally beat to bleeding such a small child.

Feeling he did something troublesome, the whole face of Ikta stiffened, to him, crying children are the most difficult thing to handle.

"Whaaaaaaat are you doooooing you dishonorable chap!!!!"

However, the voices blaming him did not come from the refugees with eyes full of hatred, instead they came from a completely unexpected direction. The site resounded with footsteps running at full speed. Just as Ikta was turning toward the direction the sound was coming from, the next second his cheek was hit by a gigantic fist.

Before he even had time to scream, his body violently flew away and hit the ground, he then no longer moved. Completely ignoring Ikta, the man who rushed to the source of crying sound– Warrant Officer Deinkun Hargunska walked toward the boy who's having a nosebleed.

"Brave youth, are you alright! My companion truly acted excessively!"

In front of the refugees who were stunned because of what had happened, Warrant Officer Deinkun took out a handkerchief from the pocket of his military uniform, after wetting it with clean water created by the water spirit, rubbed the boy's face.

"Hm, it's a nosebleed huh! It is evidence of resisting violence, in other words it's an honorable wound! You deserve praises!"

"…Eh…..Ah…."

"No, no, even if you don't say anything I understand! Although I have already sanctioned the guy who acted roughly toward the courageous you, but with only that it is unreasonable to ask you to calm down…Ugh!"

Bang! The sound of beating rang. Turns out Warrant Officer Deinkun threw a directly frontal blow to his nose. After a moment of silence, an unknown amount of blood many times over that of the boy's flooded out.

"Huahahaha, now it's fair! Please take this as apology and forgive that guy's roughness, oh little brave!"

Warrant Officer Deinkun whose blood was coming out of his nose like a waterfall, hearty laughed and patted the boy on the shoulder. The refugees on the sideline looking at this series of events were completely overwhelmed by his momentum and has temporally forgotten their hatred.

"Are…Are you alright Company commander…..!"

On the other hand, Suuya frantically rushed to the side of the commander who has flown for almost three meters. Perhaps from the beginning he didn't faint? Ikta gently pushed up his body. The left cheek that received Warrant Officer Deinkun's fist has swollen twice the size of the other side.

"…I apologize, Suuya. Can I bother you to call over Warrant Officer Deinkun?"

Suuya nodded and immediately begun to move. She went around to the back of the big military officer who was still talking with the boy and whispered in his ear with stinging voice the report. The resentment of having the superior beaten was fully displayed on her face.

Shortly after Warrant Officer Deinkun turned and strode toward the subject he had just hit. He then with a tone like challenging an opponent spoke to Ikta who already got up and was dusting the dirt off his pants.

"To think you would raise your hand against a child, I'm really looking down upon you, Ikta Sorlok! Your identity is still tentatively an imperial Knight nominated by His Majesty, however in such situation you got wrong the great ambition of the soldier, what are you planning to do about it!

Seeing Warrant Officer Deinkun not only hit the other but also started giving a lesson made Suuya reach the limit of her tolerance.

“We just decided to calmly listen but from the start you were blabbing out self-centered statements…! Before using force why didn’t you ask what was the situation! Warrant Officer Ikta did not make the child cry on purpose–”

“You shut up! When knights are having a conversation, those not involved shall not interrupt!”

“Ugh! You clearly are just a ‘self-named’ Knight….! This really ires me, please immediately apologize to Warrant Officer Ikta about all your disrespectful action to date! Our side was even injured! If we go on like this there’s no way to settle–”

Ikta gently raised his hand to stop Suuya who wanted to push harder. Warrant Officer Deinkun ignored her who was feeling confused, and with an unhappy face looked at Ikta.

“You seems to be a hopeless person, since the beginning I wanted to preach this to you. However, because of the presence of the princess, I could only endure it till now. Meeting with me today is your doom, if there’s something you want to complain about the straightforwardly–”

“No, there aren’t. Thank you, Warrant Officer Deinkun. You truly saved me there.”

Since Warrant Officer Deinkun has completely entered in his battle stance, this reply was far beyond his expectations. There would be no one who would think someone you hit and insulted would give his thanks. While he was stunned because of the shock, Ikta continued to calmly speak.

“Saying since we are at it might sound rude, but I bother you with continuing the job of assigning residences to them? You shouldn’t be hated by the refugees, and since the situation has developed to this point, it may be best for me to leave as soon as possible.”

“……….Of course there are no problems……”

“Thank you, I’m truly sorry that I have to push the responsibilities of this job onto you, in the future I definitely find opportunities to pay you back.”

After Ikta lowered his head and finished talking, he called over his troops and moved toward the village’s exit. Suuya who has yet to calm down followed beside him and continued to ask the superior:

“Why….Why are we stepping back? We should have explained the actual facts and refuted him!”

“Why should we? I clearly have reasons to thank Warrant Officer Deinkun and miss any for resenting him– look behind you.”

Following Ikta, Suuya too turned her head and looked in the same direction, what entered her vision was the sight of Warrant Officer Deinkun busy directing the refugees after having taken over Ikta. The Shinaak villagers all obediently listened to his instructions, after the earlier event, no one harbored hatred in their eyes toward the soldiers anymore.

“Making the kid bleed was my mistake. To settle up that situation would require tremendous efforts, and even after that I believe it would leave grudges. Deinkun helped us arbitrate that matter, so we have to give our thanks to him.”

“Why like this….! I don’t think he had thought of that. I believe that person just wanted to show Knight like behavior in front of a bunch of people!”

“It doesn’t matter. He actions were based on his personal chivalry code, the situation got fully resolved too, because his behavior was effective in these circumstances it certainly deserves direct praises.”

“I cannot accept it! Because when we are battling with the Shinaak tribe, our job is… it’s to kill all of them…! Then in that case isn’t Warrant Officer Deinkun the same as us? Instead just him was commended because he treated well an enemy kid… this is too weird, it’s just hypocritical!”

Suuya as if she could no longer keep her feelings in check, yelled. Ikta gently raised his hand and pat her head.

“….I say Suuya. If you believe that no matter what kind situation kindness is done in good faith, and whatever kindness that doesn’t fit that condition is hypocrisy, then it would be best to change your way of thinking. The reason is, humans are only able to archive something that is within the extent permitted by the circumstances.”

“Warrant Officer Deinkun is the same. From his personality’s standpoint, the current fratricidal war making fellow citizen kill each other should be cause of deep pain, right? Facing someone taking the initiative to attack you leaves no choices but to fight back, however when the other side is not doing that, you’d want to treat them as kindly as possible. The causes of these thoughts are very natural and there’s no need to be ashamed of them. When you knew that after torching the village you didn’t have to kill the inhabitants, didn’t you also sigh in relief? These two things work on the same principle.”

For Suuya, this was the first time she was gently admonished by the superior. Perhaps it was because of that? Tears poured out for no reason at all, she could only raise her head and desperately try to hold them back.

“….Wuu… If that guy’s feelings is the same as ours, then why is our position so different? Warrant Officer Ikta was hit by the stone thrown by the child, the face too beaten to be so swollen. Only that Deinkun was able to show his righteous actions, what is the cause of all these differences…!”

Irrepressible tears fell along Suuya’s cheek leaving a watery trace, her superior, using his finger, rubbed it away.

"I apologize, Suuya. It's just this matter puts emphasis on the aptness…. you too understand, unlike me who just holds to an empty title, Warrant Officer Deinkun is a downright Knight. The role of a hated character does not suit that kind of person right?"

After saying so, Ikta scantly tried to make a smile with his swollen face. That expression, from another point of view, appeared as if he was crying, making Suuya uncomfortable in looing back directly.

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After successfully joining forces at the 4200 meters high plateau, the soldiers were embracing each other, rejoicing for meeting again and among them some were even crying. Because whatever your unit's affiliation was with any of the three brigades, for this journey, there wasn't one soldier who didn't psychologically prepare for the 'possibility oneself wouldn't be able to reach the rendezvous point alive'.

"You gentlemen did really well to overcome the agonious journey and gather here, I feel proud of you."

Since the situation had developed this far, the supreme commander of the northern region also came to the frontline. Facing the 8900 soldiers who were exhausted from the long march and continuous battles, Lieutenant General Safida rewarded their hard work with his extremely touched manners.

However, seeing those bloodshot eyes and the messy beard, one at this point would doubt if he had enough margin to feel honored. Even if one were to put all the lives lost in this war under the category of 'Unavoidable sacrifices for the completion of the missions', the numbers were a bit too high, and after this is over it will all fall under the responsibility of Lieutenant General Safida and be investigated right? Because he was in such a situation, he now must be busy thinking what excuse he could use to deal with Central.

"Although we were ridiculed by the despicable tactics of those barbarians and costed us more effort than what we had estimated, but this war is coming close to an end. The residual Shinaak rebels' groups defeated by all of you present has gradually gathered at a large-scale settlement two days by foot down from this plateau, the presence of the matriarch Nanak Dar was also confirmed, I'm afraid that will be the last battle closing the curtains to this punitive operation. I hope you gentlemen will display your true battle prowess and make the fresh blood of the Shinaak tribe as offering, dedicated to all our comrades fallen on the Grand Arfatra Mountain!"

He really dared to say… Ikta pulled a long face. If you make use of the enemy's blood to comfort the dead, the first blood that should be offered wouldn't have to be from the one who was just now advocating with a loud voice a revenge to relieve the spirits? He was the one who decided to go to war, it was also him who drew the flawed invasion plans. Most of the fallen officers were also victims of his inability– this point of view was also the reality.

“Currently the three brigades grouped here have been completely rearranged, however the departure time is set to tomorrow morning, today will be used for preparations. Everyone should eat well and sleep well, making use of today to recharge your energies in order to face the final battle… this is what I wanted to pass to you!”

Maybe he was taking into account the soldiers’ exhaustion, or perhaps he didn’t have the strength speak a wordy statement, the Lieutenant General’s speech was unexpectedly brief. The soldiers who got a day off under the commands of their superiors, returned to the campground.

The vast plateau was packed full with the 9000 soldiers, of course the headquarters tent set up at the center also gathered many officers. However, compared to the early stage of the war, the average age of the group went down more than ten years. The reason for this was because many high-ranking military officers have withdrawn either because of wounds or death, and their vacant positions filled with urgently appointed lower ranked officers.

Of course Ikta and others were also included and belonged to youngest group. In the big warm tent, the order of knights that still remained even after experiencing the brutal battlefield stayed at the table and had a normal meal they didn’t get since long ago.

“Oh～we really updated the generation to a considerable extent. Looking at this situation, the northern garrison will more or less run into problems when resuming normal activity after the war.”

Ikta said so while sipping the smoking hot tea. He who was a Warrant Officer of a reserve force in the rear is now a Company commanded tasked with a job that is in reality that of a Lieutenant’s. If one were interested in succeeding, this couldn’t but be considered a golden opportunity, however, for the one person we are talking about, compared to this he desired more returning to a normal life and drink alcohol.

“It has long been the case hasn’t it? After all the pillars came down with Major Taekk’s death.”

“Too many officers have fallen…. The original 18000 forming the three brigades, after joining on this side has become 8900 strong. Who would have thought only half would be left. Wouldn’t this kind of situation be normally considered complete annihilation?”

“It’s because the numbers of soldiers withdrawing because there were no definite countermeasures for altitude sickness have long exceeded the deaths and wounded….and this also doesn’t include those who fell in battle because of the altitude sickness.”

“This truly is a tragic war, no matter from what point of view you are looking at it from…. I think this will be passed down as such even after this is over.”

Silence fell. Because of the impact of fatigue accumulated until now, it no matter what made people unable to say their usual spiel. Yatori felt spending the vacation they have finally gotten in there was not good and after finishing the meal she got up.

“Haro, do you want to come rub our sweat off? I overheard it earlier, it seems today we might use a bit of warm water. Maybe it’s just to a comfortable level, but at least we can change clothes.”

“Ah… great idea… I really wanted to freshen up, I will come with you～”

Haro very straightforwardly agreed and together with Yatori left the tent. As result an indescribable atmosphere was created between the boys left behind.

“…. Women, no matter what kind of situation they are in, they are still women.”

“Hahahaha….wanting to keep a neat outward appearance at all times has already become their natural instinct.”

“What does it matter, it’s thanks to that our troops can remain a gorgeous atmosphere. Speaking of the only unconditioned merit the imperial army has, it’s the equal male female ratio. I don’t aknowledge any objection.”

Ikta unhesitatingly asserted. As if hearing this ticked something amazing in Matthew’s head, he with a serious expression leaned forward on the table followed by a whisper:

“…….Uhm, I always wanted to ask you guys this question….”

“Wha-what’s the matter, Makkun? You’re suddenly being so serious…”

Matthew looked up closely at Ikta and Torway’s faces, and after hesitating five seconds he blurted it out.

“…How do you cope with that in time of war? That…ugh… I mean, you know, how to handle those kind of desires…”

Silence followed. After some time has elapsed, Torway who was slow in understand the meanings, was totally flushed with a red face, Ikta near them instead crossed his arms as if deep in thought. Since no response came even after he had waited for a while, Matthew asked the same question again.

“…. Matthew, my friend. To simply answer that kind of question, we need to separate us into two kind of people. The hero in pursuit of close friendship and the aloof warrior.”

“What hero in pursuit of friendship…. you are talking in exaggerated analogy again. Whatever, you are correct that the end result would be something like that.”

“Thus the hero and the warrior are incompatible with each other. Based on your expectations for mine and Torway’s answer this might end up very well with a war. Are you mentally prepared?”

Ikta seriously made such assessment. In front of Matthew who was being overwhelmed by his spirit,

Torway hesitatingly murmured:

“I….I normally don’t go thinking about that kind of stuff….”

“You can’t possibly never have those thoughts, you are a man after all, what do you deal with it when you can’t control it anymore?”

“Matthew, let him off. That Ikemen is not the ‘hero trying to mimic the warrior, but in reality still remains a hero’ type and have complex feelings inside kind of person, but instead a warrior that does not understand how to be flexible. Even if it is now just an unrequited love, he is still very single minded toward his love interest.”

Hearing Ikta’s conjecture made Torway’s blush propagate to his ears and him lowering his head. Seeing this spectacle made Matthew accept Ikta’s theory and made his target move onto the next prey.

“Well, honestly speaking I also thought Torway to be like that… however the issue is you, Ikta.”

“In war times, both homosexual and heterosexual activities are strictly forbidden by the imperial military regulations.”

“What’s your point in bringing up the military regulations… basically, even those who actually do the deed are aware of these rules. Isn’t it because of this that since the past up to right now there are only increasingly more soldiers withdrawing because of pregnancy?”

“Yeah, you’re right. Even if we were to limit it with regulations, there is no way to stop people in love. About this I am also saying now that I completely share’s your thoughts.”

“Since you put it that way, you truly have done it? …If it were so then where did you find the so important partner? Talking about places closest to you… is she from your own Platoon?”

“OiOi Matthew, doing that kind of thing if caught would affect your subordinates’ trust, even I am not an exception.”

“How would that be. Even that Sergeant Mittokalif was the same, she clearly harbored such deep hatred toward you at the beginning, but aren’t you completely close to each other right now?”

“About Suuya, our relationship just zeroed from being in the negative…. furthermore, losing your subordinates’ trust will drop the troops’ total strengths, in other word it would result in an increase of risks in battle operations. In war times when me and my friends’ lives are on the line, do you think I would do such unscientific practices?”

Since he himself was able to survive so far only thanks to listening Ikta’s instructions, Matthew could not help but accept this basis. However, there were many more points he could pressure and Matthew came with another question:

"Then, have you put your hands on female from other units? …No, it's more realistic for you to look for partners who are also officers. After all, in that case even if your relationship cover was to be blown, it wouldn't affect your subordinates' trust."

"That was a spectacular inference, Matthew. But did you think this out thoroughly– according to your theory, if we are talking about the potential partner I would most likely choose, wouldn't some familiar names stand out?"

As Ikta had just finished saying this, Torway who originally still kept his head low, very quickly raised his face, Matthew too with enough strength to move the table, pushed forward his body.

"Don't tell me you made your move on either Yatori or Haro! Where! …No, wait a second, I don't want to hear it, I would like to know it but at the same time don't want to know it! If I were to know, I wouldn't know how to face that person from tomorrow onward…!"

Matthew agonized over it while holding his head. On the other side, Torway with a focused stare that would pierce a hole into a person looked at Ikta.

What's wrong Ikemen, you are staring at me. Oh, were you interested? Interested in whether I am your love rival.

"N-No… it's not like that…"

Hearing Ikta maliciously leading the topic, Torway was momentarily left with a loss of words….however, in his position, deep inside he thought to make use of this opportunity to clear things out.

"….But to be honest, since the moment I met you I had this feeling. I felt that between Ikkun and Yatori-san there's something that doesn't allows meddling from others. If my intuition was not wrong…"

I hope you can clearly say it here and now–Torway bearing this in mind stared at Ikta, Matthew too was holding his breath while looking from the side.

A dozens of seconds then passed. After letting a set of completely grueling moments to pass, Ikta finally with exaggerating actions, shrugged his shoulders.

"….Sorry, sorry. I apologize for pouring cold water on this heated discussion, but think about it for a second, can you guys imagine the scenario where that Yatori, the Igsem successor known by everyone would violate military regulations for this reason?"

"Ah…"

"Now that you mention it…"

"See? As result of eliminating her, only Haro remains. No matter how weak that girl looks like, her defense in critical areas are really solid. In conclusion, to leave some hopes, let's say I'm trying to break through. If there is some progress, I will immediately inform you."

As Ikta was peacefully bringing the discussion to the conclusion, Captain Sazaruf who had dinner a little distance away walked toward them. He stopped in front of the three who timely did the salute and revealed a wry smile on his face.

"You people, it's great to be in good spirit but when discussing about a vulgar topic, you should use a lower volume. I am letting you go free because of the current situation we are in, normally I would have you run in circle around the fort as punishment for breaking discipline."

"W-We're awfully sorry…."

"It was so shameful, Makkun…."

"Oh I'm sorry. Speaking of which, Captain Sazaruf what type are you?"

Ikta dropped the two who were reflecting with a blush on their face, with a full face smile expanded the discussion to include the new member. Seeing this bold act, Captain Sazaruf did not get angry, instead decided to play along and answer his question.

"Although I can't say this publicly, but in the past I could be considered a hero… well, even in this war I did not have any margin to play around with nearby women."

"As expected of our senior, the number of battles he has experienced matches his age. When we return to the base please allow me to hear of those heroic tales."

"Ha, I don't know if the contents will fill your expectations but it's for another time– then I need to go now, you guys go to sleep early today."

After casually raising his hand to send his regards, Captain Sazaruf left the place. After watching his back leave, this time it was Matthew's turn to get up. Since the meal and discussion had long come to an end, this was the natural thing to do.

However, as Matthew was about to nonchalantly leave his seat, he was stopped by Ikta.

"Wait a moment Matthew, my friend. You pressed your question onto us and now you are trying to escape before answering anything, isn't this a tad bit too unfair?"

"Guh…"

"Well you too tell us. It's nothing difficult, you just have to choose from the two answers– are you a hero? Or a warrior? Do you want to rely on friendship? Or prefer a solitary life?"

Ikta with a very entangling voiced tried to force an answer out of Matthew, a very, very heavy silence was maintained between them for more than twenty seconds. However, after that– Matthew with a resolute face turned around and started shouting. With an upright position as if he didn't have anything to be hidden from the world, as if he wanted to reveal the soul itself.

"…Pay tribute to the Warrior!"

Facing this amazing charisma, Ikta and Torway stood up at the same moment and responded with a salute pose.

""Sir,yes,sir!""

***

The following morning came, under the orders of Lieutenant General Safida, the three brigades with already depleted personnel departed after full preparation. Having rested for a whole day and maybe perhaps the understanding that the next battle may be last, permitted the soldiers to maintain the morale.

"Oh… my apologies…"

"Be more careful you retard! You have a death wish?!"

It's only, even at this very moment, it can't be said there's no uneasiness in Ikta's eyes. The first point was the murderous intent some soldiers from the other brigades were emitting. They would start cursing and threatening others just because they bumped into their shoulder, in worse cases they would make the first move and start fights.

"I can't help but think that the brutish members have increased. It's not like we are mercenaries led by warlords, even if the imperial army had made mistakes, it's not like we are some unorganized brutish group."

"It's in helpless situation that they become like that. After seeing so many deaths from both sides, compared to maintaining control, letting it all go is way easier… it's only I really hope my subordinates becomes like that."

After he finished speaking, Ikta peeked toward the back. A company formed by knight's training corps and tasked to protect the headquarters followed behind him. Ikta and other officers were now in the same area as Lieutenant General Safida which is why the control of the Platoon was now left in the hands of the standing noncommissioned officers. In addition, in order to facilitate the officers' ability to survey the surrounding, they were now all mounted on horse.

Tl note: i.e. Suuya, Sargent is a NCO

"Even for me, I had them kill so many people. If we can use pumpkin cutting kitchen knife techniques

to kill people, we can only say it's the result of proper training… however, are there no issues? Can those soldiers still distinguish the differences between humans and pumpkins?"

To this contradictory problem, no one could propose a satisfactory answer. However, the war will not wait and the ranks continued forward carrying with it the youths with complex feelings.

"…This terrain formation does not look good"

Captain Sazaruf whispered after seeing the landscape emerging in the frontal direction. It was a massive gorge, the two walls on face each other from a distance of 200 meters, their troops have to continue marching following one side of the valley.

Just a single misstep would cause people to fall hundreds on meters into the abyss was also a matter of course, however in this case, what worried more was the cliff on the other side. There not only were several irregular formations that could become foothold, the distance of 200 meters is also at a distance that could not be taken lightly. Perceiving the Captain's thoughts, Torway in a reserved manner said:

"About that, Captain Sazaruf…. if I am wrong please do forgive me, but are you perhaps worried of the wind mortal shelling that could come from the opposite cliff?"

"…. To think you would have guessed that. That's right, it's exactly so. If we were to be subject to a unilateral attack, we would have no means to fend for ourselves. Even if we were to consider firing back with the wind mortals, but compared to us who are marching and thus scattered, the enemy would also have their cannons distributed throughout the cliff."

In this very rare occasion Torway, after hearing the Captain's words, clearly stated his own opinion.

"While those were very legitimate concerns, but I think the possibility for that are not high."

"Ou? Why would that be, Warrant Officer Torway?"

"First, as I am an air gunner, I have certain degree of experience with the usage of wind mortals. If I were to give my opinion on the current situation, no matter where you would deploy artillery on that cliff it would be am extremely difficult feat. Since the footholds over there are all isolated, in order to transport the cannons, it would require extraordinary efforts. Even if they were to overcome that issue, the next thing that come is the foothold being too small, just the body of the wind mortal alone is enough to fill all the space, there's no place left to store the shells that would demand almost the same amount of space."

"Uh…"

"Even supposing the enemy was able to find solution to these two difficulties, I think we would be able to notice the enemy's presence from this side, and even after scanning with binoculars we didn't find any movements. Based on the above reasons, I determined that the possibility of an enemy

surprise attack is not high.”

Hearing this introverted youth who opposite to his usual clearly explained his thoughts not only Captain Sazaruf but every army companion listening around felt surprised. Furthermore, his opinion was logical and relevant, Captain Sazaruf whose uneasiness was dissipated nodded with satisfaction, as he was planning to face the front once again, at that moment….

“No, it’s better if we make preparations. Captain Sazaruf, can we have shields on the side of this officers’ area?”

Ikta categorically spoke words that the overthrown the previous consensus, both Torway and Captain Sazaruf stared at him in surprise.

“…I agree with what Warrant Officer Torway had just explained, based on what are you trying to overthrow that? Warrant Officer Ikta.”

“I too agree with what he has said. Furthermore, I’m not trying to overturn his ideas, it’s just I think it’s better if we take preventive measures.”

“Well, it doesn’t hurt to be extra careful… But against the shelling we predicted, a defense of shield bearing soldiers cannot be called a good countermeasure you know? ”

“Even that would be better than nothing… and you also have to consider the object flying over might not only be mortal shells.”

As he mentioned this, Ikta looked at the other side with a stiff expression. Seeing the seriousness in his eyes, Torway too abandoned his theory of ‘there will be no surprise attack from the other side of the cliff’– since Ikta was in alert, then of course there was that possibility.

“…. Captain Sazaruf, I apologize, I would like to retract what I had said. As Warrant Officer has proposed, can you order the shield bearers to protect the officers group?”

“Hey hey, are you serious? If we make a shield wall on the side facing the cliff that would mean we too, in order to be protected by the shields, get off the horses. This would also include Lieutenant General Safida over th…”

“There would be no point in doing so otherwise! Field-grade officers have all gone to command the front ranks, not including Lieutenant General himself, the highest ranked officer among us is you Captain. Please go try propose this, show your courage!”

Captain Sazaruf, who was completely being pushed around, said ‘whoa’ and corrected facial expression at the same time pulled on the reins and got closer to the Lieutenant General Safida advancing on horse and who had the same red eyes he had yesterday.

Tl note: whoa is a vocal command telling the horse to slow down

https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/whoa

"…Hm? What?"

Facing his regional supreme commander stare at him with suspecting eyes, having a cold sweat Captain Sazaruf made the proposal.

"Err… That… I mean… after surveying the surrounding terrain, my subordinates have suggested the need to be on guard for nearby enemies, I too agreed so there was a proposal for having the shield bearers to protect all officers present…"

"If you have judged that then just take the initiative."

"Yes, I'm very sorry. However, because of that, there is another request…. considering the height of the shields the infantry carry, there is no way they would completely protect people on horse from shells…. so I truly apologize for this but…"

Even before the fiercely cold sweating Captain who was dragging out the conversation finished, the Lieutenant General already understood.

"–You mean I need to get off the horse?"

"Ah… ehm… that's the end result… yes… to think we would trouble you Lieutenant General with that, I'm deeply terrified…"

Captain Sazaruf threw away his reputation and self-esteem and is now just pleading with a lowered head. Even with that the Lieutenant General still felt reluctant, but facing the persistence of the humble Captain, he could not bear with it much longer.

"…I just need to come down right? Then I will get off the horse."

Lieutenant General Safida as if he was left with no other choices came down the horse and started walking while pulling the reins. Captain Sazaruf following the superior's lead also got off the horse and looking like he had exhausted all his stamina, he walked back toward Ikta.

"….I got the permission, with this it's all good right? Good, then you all come down quickly too…"

Captain Sazaruf thought of his earlier appearance and ordered languidly. He then cursed:"Ahh goddamit! That was an earful!" and forcefully scratched his head. At this moment Ikta opened his mouth and said:

"…Captain Senpa Sazaruf, may I express my thoughts?"

"OiOi, do you plan to keep abusing this uncle… yes yes yes, I know what you want to say, I know earlier I was good for nothing–"

“You are the best superior, I want say this coming deep from my heart.”

First were Ikta and Torway, then following their action everyone from the order of knights with the same movement raised their hands in salute. Facing them who were truly emitting an aura of respect and gratefulness, Captain Sazaruf, unaccustomed to this kind of treatment, was left unknowing of how to respond to that, for now he could only stand there in place for many seconds.

“…Haha why are you suddenly doing this, you shouldn’t tease adults.”

Then Captain Sazaruf as if escaping the subordinates’ gaze turned away toward the front and scratched his cheek seemingly very embarrassed. The same thoughts occurred to the five members of the order of knights looking at this scene– after getting involved with this war, it’s the first time they met a superior worthy of their respect.

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Tens of meters below the cliff along which the imperial soldiers were walking there was a ditch. In this naturally formed cave by the long erosion carried out by the wind and rain were gathered more than forty silhouettes.

“…According to the light signals sent by the unit we stationed on the other side of the cliff, the attack is about to begin, captain”

Tl note: Captain here is not the rank (thus not with uppercase C), but the general notion of a leader.

The shadow closest to the exist after observing the other side of the cliff reported toward the depth, to the silhouette whose eyes were exuding a particularly dangerous luster. Then, even if no sound was heard, somebody stood up.

“We will wait for a bit and then participate. Everyone prepare to climb; air shooters equip the short gun.”

Hearing the orders, the shadows started to mount the partners on the air gun which had it barrel shortened to the minimum lenght possible and fed into their mouth the loaded magazines held in the leather bag. This way they could skip the step of loading the bullets and the air gun could also be used with only one hand. This was a weapon used if it was predicted to enter a close quarters combat.

“We must finish this mission taking advantage of the Shinaak tribe’s attack. Our target is the supreme commander of the northern region, Tamshiikushik Safida alone, don’t bother with the others. Only if there are obstacles coming in between, we will quickly dispose them.”

“”””Yes, Sir!””””

“At mission accomplished, or retreat if it were to end a failure, you have to use the seventeen ropes

set beforehand to reach the bottom of the cliff. Moreover, death is not allowed this time. If you find yourselves cornered, you must jump down the cliff. This way there is the possibility of retrieval, your death is absolutely not permitted under their eyes."

The uniform replies continued. There are no more deficiencies– the leader of the shadows determined so and declared:

"Begin operation– <Phantom corps>, move out to battle."

In one breath they emerged from the darkness, just like an ants' army crawling out of the nest.

The signal for the start of the battle did not come from the cliff on the other side, where Ikuta was focusing his attention, nor from below the cliff where the Phantom group had been working secretly, but on top of the Imperial Army that was stretched out along the path.

"The mountains are our world! Prepare to open your eyes wide and be surprised, you devils from the plains!"

A barrage of fire arrows rained on the soldiers' heads with a girl's announcement. Everyone was bewildered by an attack from an unexpected angle, and the wagons and clothings hit by the arrows started to burn.

U-Up above?! What's this! There shouldn't be a place big enough for an army up there.

Matthew, who had taken after Ikuta to prepare for the worst and memorized the marching path along with the surrounding terrains, could not hide his surprise. Just as his assumptions were flipped upside down and his head turned into a cacophony, Ikuta spoke stoically.

"Calm down Matthew. There's no place to put soldiers above the cliff. Speaking normally, anyways. This is simply a desperate push by a trapped enemy."
"Yeah, I think so too. It would be an impossible ambush except for the nimble Shinaak tribesmen, but considering the damage from the fire arrows, there are not that many of them. The shock will only last for a moment. If we can take care of the confusion now—"

While Torway was speaking, a scream erupted out as to mock his assumption. Captain Sazaruf's troops, who had been walking in front of Ikuta's group, were groaning while bleeding from the shoulders or their sides.

"What, gunfire…?! Is this from the above as well?!"
Captain Sazaruf shouted while taking cover, but the reality was different. Confirming that the damage from gunfire were concentrated to soldiers who were walking at the edge of the cliff, Ikuta bit his tongue after fully understanding the situation.

"No, they're shooting from the cliff from the other side… Damn it, they were there as I thought."

“What? From the cliff on the other side..?! Don’t be foolish. It’s at least 200m away to the other side! Even if they shoot from there, there’s no way it could reach all the way here—”

Torway, who had the related knowledge grasped the situation immediately without waiting for Captain Sazaruf to come to his own understanding. His expression soon froze into a tremble.

“Ik-kun, this means… they have the same as us…!”

“Yeah, you’re right… They’re snipers armed with air rifles!”

Just as Ikuta came to the conclusion, several allied soldiers at the edge of his vision fell. If they did not know where the shots were coming from, they could not do anything—. The moment he realized that, the boy stopped watching from the side idly.

“Torway, how long as you going to just sit there? Run over to your squad and return fire! The only squad that can do anything about this is your squad that is armed with air rifles!”

“Ug, got it…! We’ll suppress them soon enough.”

Torway quickly sprinted away after having realized his role. Even Ikuta could not formulate a response for the current situation. It was a wise precaution to have officers protected with shields, but…

“... Since we can’t avoid casualties from the snipers, only way is to speed up the march and get out of this valley as soon as possible. We just need to get out of the range of the air rifles.”

However, a messenger who waded in through the crowd of people shattered Ikuta’s optimistic outlook.

“Lieutenant General Safida! The entire front column is being attacked and further advance is not possible! I request that the rear column to wait—”

“Impossible! Do you not see this situation? This place is under attack as well, and you still ask to slow down the advance….!”

Lieutenant General Safida’s face grew bluer by the moment. But Ikuta felt the same way inside. They could not fight the enemy, and escaping via advancing was also not an option. The only way left was —.

“...Captain Sazaruf! What do you think about ordering retreat for all the squad to the rear of here?”

“I agree— but at this point, a retreat is beyond my authority!”

Then you need to convince the Lieutenant General— As Ikuta was about to say that, a warning from

Yatori came from behind.

“Everyone, above you! They’re coming!”

Everyone snapped to look to the sky in surprise and several shadows jumped on in succession. The Shinaak tribesmen who had set up camp above cliff had slid down holding rope in one hand. The soldiers’ thinking process stopped at the inconceivable ways the enemy suicide squads were appearing.

“Matthew, Haro, fix bayonet! They’re coming from this side, too!”

Ikuta shouted as he fixed his bayonet to his bowgun. It was a laughable situation. The group of officers being protected front and rear by hundreds of men and surrounded with shields were being targeted by the enemy.

“Agh, arrgh… What is this. It’s not going in…!”
Haro, who was some distance away from the other knights, was struggling to insert the bayonet onto her bowgun. She could just use it without fixing it on there, but she could not think that fast amidst the chaos. She was not used to battles as there was a lot of work that needed to be done in the field hospital at the rear.

“Haro, calm down! I’m going over right now!”
Ikuta ran. Yatori was guarding Lieutenant General Safida, Torway had gone off to return fire, and Matthew was barely managing to defend himself. By the process of elimination, the only thing to do was to go save Haro.

The soldiers’ confusion piled on. The fearless Shinaak warriors had landed amidst them and started to attack. The majority of the soldiers had not fixed bayonet and could not adequately respond to sudden close-quarter combat that landed amidst them from the sky.

“Haro, watch out! Above!”
“Ah—”

They probably thought that a girl who was struggling to fix bayonet was a ripe target. An enemy who had slid down half way from the cliff kicked against the stone wall and jumped. And landed— right beside Haro.

He’ll get there a step too late at this rate. Ikuta decided that in a flash, abandoned his bowgun and flung himself at Haro, who was standing upright. He fell while grabbing just below her waist. At that moment, the enemy’s kukri just grazed the back of his head.

“Ha…. you bastard…!”

There was no time to relax even though he had dodged the attack. Instead of his abandoned weapon, he borrowed the bowgun from Haro’s hand and stood up. The enemy who couldn’t finish off his prey

was coming for them again.

He barely received the kukri's heavy blow with the shaft of the bowgun. It became a battle of strength with a blade against a shaft, but Ikuta's chance of victory at this point had disappeared. He fell on the ground from the force pushing in from the blade and became defenseless as if asking to be finished.

"I'll join innnnnnnn!"

Then with a voice loud enough to tear his eardrum, someone unexpected came to the rescue. Warrant Officer Deinkun's gigantic sword slashed and blew away the enemy who had rushed in to finish Ikuta.

The kukri fell on the ground split in two, and the enemy's body, which even had its spine smashed, rolled down the cliff. Even Ikuta could not keep his mouth closed at this turn of events.

"Stand up quickly, Ikuta Solork! Even this one will not be able to save you twice!"

As Ikuta tried to get up, he finally saw Warrant Officer Deinkun's gear. The armour was centered around the chest, thick plates covered various parts of the body and he wielded a claymore for mounted combat. That unfaltering medieval appearance was that of the Northern Defense Command's final defense troop, a Cuirassier platoon leader's formal wear.

"Thank you, Warrant Officer Deinkun. You said you can't save me twice, but considering the last time, it has already been twice."

"You do not need to count the last time. This one was in a hurry back then as well."

Warrant Officer Deinkun picked up the bowgun dropped a bit away and responded cooly while giving it back. The boy extended a hand to Haro to help her up in one while glancing at the face of the giant who was a full head and a half taller than him.

"There is one question. When this one had hit you and you collapsed… you did not become angry, but thanked me instead."

"Mmm, ah… Thanks to that, we could avoid the villagers' resentment."

"But you would have lost face. Were you not apprehensive about something like that would shame you?"

It was a direct and in your face kind of a question. So Ikuta replied back without hesitation.

"— No. It was a bit embarrassing, but didn't change the fact your powerful strike fixed the situation. Well, just for reference… I never had a face that would be slighted after getting beat up in the first place."

"... Is that so. Then, conversely, what kind of situation would you lose face in?"

“Ah. Hmm, that would be—”

While talking to Warrant Officer Deinkun, Ikuta handed over a bowgun with a bayonet strapped tightly on it over to Haro. The boy spoke with a serious expression on his face while brushing off the dirt on her face with his fingers.

“— Not being able to say everything when I have wanted to, not being able to protect things when I have wanted to, those kind of situations.”

On his words, Ikuta remember the face of a woman he met twice, but could not meet for the third time. But he sealed it up immediately. He closed the lid on his memories and chased away the reminiscence of the past.

That was a face he had already lost. What he needed to focus on now was the ones who were not dead.

“... I don’t understand, but I do know one thing. We do not go well together.”

Warrant Officer Deinkun spoke very clear-cut while holding on to the claymore on top of a horse. Ikuta understand immediately. There was no room for misunderstanding. He even thought that it would be hard to find two people who were so different from another. Even still.

“But… that’s the kind of a knight you are.”

The moment he heard those words, there was a self-mocking smile on the boy’s face. — He misunderstands many things. If he concluded things on such friendly level, then the words they had exchanged so far would be meaningless.

Amidst the noise generated by allies and enemies mixing together, Yatori Igsem was staring at the sky while holding her trademark twin sword in her hands.

Standing directly in front of Lieutenant General Safida, she was practically the centre point for the guards. She was confident she could defeat any enemy, no matter which direction they came from.

The tip of her twin swords shuddered like an antenna that had picked up on something. It was because of a small body that was not just content on sliding down the cliff, but was running with a rope in one hand came into sight.

Yatori felt an untimely awe. Even amongst Shinaak tribe who were famed for being nimble, there were not many who would act so recklessly.

“Lieutenant General Safida, do not move from that spot!”

Half way down the cliff, the shadow kicked off the wall. It was a superhuman jump taking advantage

of nimble movements, but did not immediately aim for Lieutenant General Safida. Because she had also instinctively sensed the existence of an obstacle she needed to overcome.

“Tyaaaaat!”

A downward strike using gravity and a precise counter which aimed for vital point thrust out from above and below. The moment their blow met each other, steel collided and sparks flew.

“Che…!”

After the first blow was intercepted mid-air, her small, cat-like body landed nimbly.

“... We meet again, red one.”

A pair of kukri in her two hands were too brutish compared to the owner’s small body. But looking at her carefully— beneath that big cape covering her, peeks of a frail yet muscular body that showed off functionality brought awe. Her large eyes, burning with a cause made everyone who looked into them hold their breath. Her black hair faded under sunlight was braided into two strands, left and right. From a glance, her partner sprite didn’t seem to be nearby.

“Yes, we meet again.”

She was cute, but not frail. She had an aura of an experienced warrior about her. It was the kind of a strength that couldn’t be conveyed from a distance when they first met.

Yatori recognized the opponent’s strength, took a stance with her twin swords without showing an opening and revealed her name as per the knight’s code.

“Imperial Army Skirmisher 1st Training Platoon leader cum Light Cavalry 1st Training Platoon leader, Warrant Officer Yatori Igsem. My partner is the fire sprite, Shia. I’m glad to meet you again, young chieftain of the Shinaak tribe.”



"Shinaak Chieftain, Nanak Dar. Hahashik is Hisha of the wind. I responded to your introductions, but don't get cocky. I won't remember any of your long and boring titles!"

Nanak Dar made herself clear and aimed the point of her two knives. Yatori took her simple and direct animosity with pleasure.

"It doesn't matter… Experience the sensation of these blades and die!"

"As if—!"

Nanak ran forward like a loosened arrow. She did not care for the sabre being thrust forward to counter and struck heavily with a kukri as if intending to break the blade. Countering this, Yatori turned her blade to deflect the strike and immediately thrust at the opening. But—

"Ugh…"

At that moment, Nanak Dar used the blade stuck onto ground as a centrifuge to rotate her body and swung for the second attack. It was a series of attack that could not exist in a conventional swordfight. Yatori managed to stand her ground by retreating a little, but the girl's truly ferocious strikes were just beginning.

"Ryaaaaat!"

The blade on the right was plucked out from the earth and attacked Yatori as it rose instead of going back to the owner. She tried to defend with the handguard of the sabre and go on the offensive, but the blade on the left dived in aiming for her left thigh. Yatori admired her moves. Each attack was unreasonably wide, but there was no opening to drive into.

"What's up, red one! Can't move around?"
Nanak Dar's assault continued. All the officers who wanted to help Yatori by jumping in hesitated and stopped. That bladework was like a windmill with blades attached to it. If they approached carelessly, that would be the end.

On the other hand, Yatori was carefully observing from the middle of the windmill's attacks. Shifting her centre of gravity with the shaft of the blade, unending rotation, stance to maximize the small stature— receiving the heated blades with a cool demeanor, she analyzed that those would be the key in breaking through Nanak Dar's swordplay.

Including Igsem's twin sword style, the majority of sword stances emphasized centre of gravity in the lower body, in other words, the hip. It was because it allowed for the most stabilized offense and defense. It is considered to have an opening when one couldn't maintain that. Even styles that had various stances, it was considered physiologically impossible to not have the centre in the lower body.

But Nanak had a different method. Amidst her attacks, her centre of gravity was obviously not in the lower body. That small body being swung around by overly heavy and large kukris maintained form without defying the laws of physics and continually moved while using a sword as the centre of gravity.

— The result was this rotating sword dance.

A blade that slid deep inside sliced a few strands of red hair. To relentlessly attack using the heavy and large pair of kukris, Nanak Dar rarely took the motion of retracting her blade. She continuously kept on the ferocious attacks by finishing a swing to link into a next attack, or stuck the blade into the ground to use as a centrifuge. Those motions gave birth to a unique motion of never-ending rotation of sword.

“You may only be an adept, but I can’t help but admit that it’s excellent.”

Compliments came out from Yatori’s mouth. Along with Shinaak tribe’s hardiness and toned muscles, Nanak Dar’s small stature has created a whole new style of sword fight. Still, no matter how much of an acrobatic stance she maintained, there was no way someone who was limited to circular movement would not reveal an opening to someone who moved in a straight line like Yatori.

The only thing that made her style possible was the lowered stance because of her small size. Compared to Yatori who could only attack downward against a smaller opponent, Nanak could retain her low stance and slash away at the opponent’s lower body. The time for the attack to reach the other would be in Nanak Dar’s favour. That advantage was supplementing the natural delays in the circular motion.

“... Kuuh. Stop it, now!”

Yatori took a blow with the guard on her main gauche and over-extended a little to drive into the circular sword style. If the sword style was focused around rotating, then she only needed to stop the rotation. However—

“No, not going to stop!”

With the kukri stuck in the guard as the centre, Nanak Dar’s body floated up in mid air. The rotation did not die out, but only had its centre axis tilted to a side. Yatori opened her eyes wide at this.

“Is that— you changed to a vertical rotation?”

“That’s correct!”

A final blow utilizing gravity came from above her head. Yatori received the attack by crossing her two swords and reduced the impact on her blades by jumping back a little.

She took a defensive stance thinking the gap between them would be closed instantly, but Nanak Dar unexpectedly stopped moving and simply watched Yatori.

"You're lasting longer than I expected. I've hit you that much, but your blade isn't broken either…"

"I'm barely holding my ground. It's amazing. I'm being outclassed by a technique I've never seen before."

"No. You had enough room to watch my skills and be amazed about it."

Nanak Dar's expression hardened against an opponent she could not fully measure up. Yatori also felt a likeableness to the opponent who did not underestimate an opponent despite the superiority.

"Seems I can't help it since I got found out. But what I have now is enough. Preliminary exchange for measuring up is over."

Yatori readied her twin swords again after speaking without any frill or deception. The atmosphere changed. From a stance focused on defense, she switched to an offensive stance to finish the fight. It was also conveyed to the opponent facing off against her.

"... Are you saying you saw through my techniques. From that short skirmish just now? Load of rubbish!"

"You don't need to believe everything I say. If you're a warrior, trust in your abilities and attack."

A sound of laughter came out from the girl's mouth. There were no truer words.

— It did not matter even if a swordmaster was here. At this moment she still believed the girl who claimed to have seen through it all would not win against her.

"... That arrogance. I'll make you regret it in hell, red one!"

Nanak Dar rushed forward with certain victory in heart. Compared to that, Yatori waited for the enemy without any movement. The point seemed to be to wait for the opponent to make the first strike and aim for a counter. It was a completely countering stance just like the proclamation that preliminary exchanges were over.

"Ryaaaaat!"
Nanak Dar swung the first strike. It was a powerful strike with all her might to break the blade. But Yatori stepped back to dodge, and the Kukri missed the mark and struck the earth. Using the stuck blade as an axis, Nanak Dar's body circle around. That scene was the same as just before. It was the same horizontal slash from an impossible position that surprised Yatori when she first saw it.

But— the same trick did not work twice.

The blade passed by in front of the thigh. Right after missing an attack, a gap that wasn't exploited for the first time appeared. Nanak Dar's body was still rotating in a circular motion. That small back was open for attack until the rotation finished and the next motion started.

Yatori's knees recoiled and sprung out like a spring. With a rapid step, she thrust the main gauche in her left hand. A killing blow that did not miss an opportunity— it was a true strike that would end the opponent.

"Ha—! Got you, fool—!"

Nanak Dar was aiming for that moment. While showing her back defenselessly, Shinaak tribe's young chieftain was laughing heartily. From her cape covered back, a trap let out its first cry.

A dry sound of air igniting sharply rang out, cutting across the sound of battle.

"Hyaaaaat!"

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A vertical strike from the claymore smashed the head of a Shinaak warrior. They were not even a proper match because their kukri could not handle the massive weight of the sword.

"Wow, amazing… I know it's sudden, but I'll have to reclassify you from a mere sandbag."

".... What did you say?"

Said Warrant Officer Deinkun as he glanced over. Ikuta tried to gloss things over by simply shaking his head. Truthfully, thanks to Deinkun's efforts, the damage from Shinaak tribe suicide squad had decreased.

"It seems Torway is managing his job of returning fire properly since the shots from the other side of the cliff lightened up. If we keep this up, we can get through this. Just hold on a bit longer Haro and Matthew."

"Ye, yeah!"

"I'm so sorry for burdening you!"

From in between Warrant Officer Deinkun and Ikuta, Matthew and Haro replied back.

Ikuta looked around. The battle was continuing, but he felt that the real hump was over. It was something that was exceedingly obvious. If they could withstand the initial shock of the ambush, the scattered enemy coming downhill could be taken out piecemeal.

"To attack with such reckless strategy must mean that Shinaaks are cornered as well… It's difficult to

counter an opponent when you don't know what they are going to do."

"Hmph, you sound like a coward. No matter what they do, you can simply wipe out them out as they come."

Ikuta shrugged his shoulder at Warrant Officer Deinkun's rather simple answer to the situation. That was when a soldier's scream resounded.

"W, what?! It was close by!"

Matthew looked around hurriedly. Their gaze, which had been facing upwards to spot any incoming enemies going down the cliff, was finally back to horizontal view of the surface thanks to that.

They quickly spotted where the scream came from. The soldiers who were standing by the edge positioned behind the officer group, which including Ikuta, were collapsing on the ground bleeding from the right side. At first Ikuta thought it was another round of shots from the other side of the cliff and clicked his tongue, but what followed was astonishing..

The marksmen who wounded them were not on the other side of the cliff, but were here.

"... Reinforcements from below the cliff?! Damn, the troops are preoccupied with what's above.."

Ikuta stood still as he spoke. The soldiers climbing up from below the cliff did not dress much differently from the Shinaak warriors. But their quality was different. From the way they moved as a group to their proficiency on how they handled their carbines, it was obvious that they were highly trained soldiers.

"Sly as always. I will face you head on!"

"...Ugh, don't be too rash, Warrant Officer Deinkun! They're completely different!"

Warrant Officer Deinkun ran forward past Ikuta's warnings and faced the enemy head on.

--There was nothing to fear. Holding the claymore in hand and protected with armour, he was certain that only person who could beat him in close quarter combat was that red haired girl.

One of the enemy who noticed his approach, turned around and stared at him. The man simply pointed the tip of the wind carbine at the giant approaching with a roar.

"Fu, do you think that pea shooter will work on me!"

Warrant Officer Deinkun saw the enemy's action and covered his face with the sword. Using the large blade as a shield, he protected the head which the enemy would obviously aim for. All vital areas outside the head were well armoured in the first place.

But it was a move that limited his own line of sight as well.

In front of the vision blocked by the sword, the man drew a knife from his waist. It was not a kukri they saw so many times until now. It was a dagger with ominous glint that was thinner and smaller. The man kicked off the ground while holding the dagger in opposite hand from his carbine, the right hand. He made no noise, like a phantom.

“HYAAAAAAH!”

Deinkun swung down his claymore at where the man used to be with all his might. But there was no expected resistance or any blood spurt. The mighty strike finished with simply cutting across the air.

“Hmm…? You, where did you go--.”

The moment Warrant Officer Deinkun tilted his head curiously, a burning sensation cut across his throat without any warning. And a second later, blood gushed out.

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The time between those two were stopped at a critical moment. .

“--- You---.”

Shinaak tribal chief, Nanak Dar squeezed out her hoarse voice while looking at the main gauche blade stabbing her in the back with an expression of disbelief.

“How did you…”

“You want to ask how I knew about that trap?”

Maintaining the stance with main gauche in her left hand thrusted out, Yatori lightly slashed with the sabre in her right hand.

The cape that was covering the girl’s back slashed in half and what was hidden inside revealed itself. It was a wind sprite fixed with a belt and a mechanism with a very short wind gun barrel. From the pierced area, air was pulsating out.

“I felt some things were amiss. First, you looked like you didn’t have a sprite with you. But you properly introduced your partner’s name as well during our exchange.”

“What…. W, with just that?”

“No, those two occasion were not everything. The moment I started suspecting something is after watching how you fight.”

While looking at the pair of kukri in the girl’s hands,Yatori continued quietly.

“...Courageous, yet bold style of dual wielding. I was truly amazed by that rotating style of fighting. But as we fought, that boldness felt unnatural. Because while we were fighting, you never bothered guarding your back. Especially in a middle of this melee where you could get stabbed in the back at any time.--”

“-- Of course, you might have been thinking about it a little bit, but you were never on guard enough to block an attack coming from behind. Since I was on guard the whole time, something felt even more wrong.”

“Kuhh….”

“Not only the Igsem dual wielding style, but the fundamentals of any dual wielder against multiple opponents is that being on guard from an attack from any direction is always a given. When you were being lazy with that, I knew for certain that you weren’t someone who only use two swords like me. That you had something hidden behind so you didn’t need to worry about your back.”

Yatori looked at that hidden card-- the sight of a wind sprite pierced along with the barrel of the wind gun.

It did not look to be in pain even after being pierced, but its eyes clearly conveyed the tension. It was not afraid of its own end. That sprite had thrown its body to stop the main gauche. Its partner’s death was only a sheet’s distance away.

“....”

“The duel’s over. Gather your tribe and surrender, Nanak Dar.”

Yatori urged her to surrender with a quiet voice. But she did not anticipate for two things here. First, that a girl named Nanak Dar would not accept defeat. Second, how the partner who knew only too well about her, Hisha, would act.

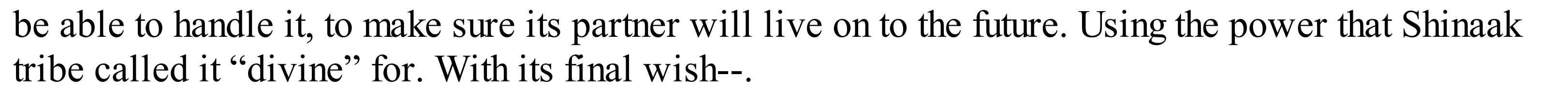
“..... Nana.”

Because of the cracks in its body, even the voice calling for its partner was not very clear. But it did not hesitate even with a body centimeters away from being broken. It was always with its partner and to help and protect life-- a duty as a sprite-- it barely clung onto life wanting to carry it out to the end.

“....?! Wait, what are you..!”
It was that kind of a situation.

“Hisha was it… If you move, your partner will die. Of course, you know that.”

Through the main gauche, Yatori could feel a violent vibration carry through to her arm. Right now, Hisha was using a wind sprite’s ability to compress air. Even though it knew that its body would not


be able to handle it, to make sure its partner will live on to the future. Using the power that Shinaak tribe called it “divine” for. With its final wish--.

“.... Live.”

With its final word, wind sprite Hisha exploded itself from internal pressure.

“Kuuh….”

Yatori instinctively took a step back to protect herself from the shrapnel mixed into the wind. Escaping from a dire spot because of her partner’s sacrifice, Nanak Dar stood up from her posture that seemed like she was about to fall forward from the explosion, and looked at her shattered partner with a devastated expression.

“..... Hisha…”

It was a voice that was dumbstruck. The sight in front of her eyes and the missing weight from her back played havoc in the girl’s mind.

While feeling sympathetic, Yatori’s will to capture the girl did not waver. She removed the shrapnel from her arm and walked towards Nanak Dar once again.

“-- Don’t be too rash, Warrant Officer Deinkun!”

Her ears picked up a familiar boy’s shout nearby. When she instinctively looked around, Yatori witnessed the sight near 30 meters away.

The scene of a giant collapsing on his knees spurting blood from the neck while standing straight proudly.

Shadows were passing by as if ignoring that body.

Those coordinated movements showed they were no ordinary people even at a glance. Especially after looking at the man standing in front of the group, an indescribable chilling sensation ran down Yatori’s back.

Those shadows cut through all interfering imperial soldiers and advanced without hesitation. They were headed straight towards Yatori, who had Lieutenant General Safida at her back.

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The sight of Warrant Officer Deinkun as he collapsed and the critical amount of blood he was losing registered in Yatori’s mind. Her gaze was constantly going back and forth between him and the enemy. And roughly 4 seconds later--

“.... Ah.”

-- Swing your swords

An instinctive feeling from her gut commanded her so.

“.... Arrrgh!”

“Kuugh?!”

Glint of the sword rose like a dragon formed a heated wave to deliver death. The leader of the shadows, who was the first to feel the fiery gale, had to concentrate with all his might to dodge it.

First exchange: deflected the first sabre strike with a dagger - lost sensation in the fingers.

Second exchange: blocked the follow up main gauche attack with the barrel of the carbine - cannot fire anymore due to the hole in the barrel.

Third exchange: parried the third strike which twisted into different direction with the armour on the arms - forearm guards were cracked.

Fourth exchange: shielded against the kick aimed at the lower stomach with two hands - the fourth and fifth digit on right hand have dislocated.

“...Ugh… kuh… ugh!”

The shadow responded without a mistake in the tug of war, which would’ve lead to death if one had made a single wrong move. He barely kept his life, widened their distance and stopped. Below that turban, the face made a surprised expression for the first time.

There was no way that Yatori, who made him make that expression, knew what a rare sight that was.

“... Phuuuu! ”

“Che..!” “...Kuh.”

Two shadows that tried to slip by her side to get to Lieutenant General realized it was a reckless plan and backed off. They could not pass. Yatori’s chilling amount of killing intent drew an invisible line of life and death.

“Matthew’s Squad, surround them!”

An order came from behind in an announcing voice. Ikuta had ordered Matthew’s squad, which was relatively close to the officer group to move.

Between the riflemen who were rushing over people, and the red haired warrior, the leader of the shadows realized it was time to back off. They rushed towards the edge and before any soldier could stop them, every single one of them went down the steep cliff slope without hesitation.

"They j-jumped..?! Ah, damn, they have ropes over here as well!"

Matthew swung his gun down the cliff in anger, but the ropes seemed to be installed some distance away from the edge of the cliff, so he could not reach it. Yatori was also looking down the cliff like him, but looked back after remembering that she had left Nanak Dar unattended.

"... Got away…"

She grinded her teeth. As expected, the disheartened girl who had lost her partner was gone. Did she escape down the cliff along with the shadows or climb up with the help of her comrades.

She thought of possibility of pursuit for a moment before giving up, took in a breath and turned around. She ran towards that spot. Ikuta and Haro were also there. They surrounded Warrant Officer Deinkun, who was keeping a shallow breathing while still being upright.

"--- Haro, how is it?"

Haro opened her mouth while standing by the head and trying to stop the bleeding.

"His artery is cut. I'm trying to stop the bleeding, but he already lost too much blood…"

That there was little chance to save him was not in the mood and voice alone, but was also evident around the ground. Around the wound in the neck, there was a puddle of blood about the size of a carpet. It was more amazing that he was still breathing after losing that much blood.

"Dein… Dein… don't die. No…"

On the other side from Haro, Warrant Officer Deinkun's partner, water sprite Niki was trying to desperately talk with its partner. He seemed to have heard that voice and tried to move his arm, but didn't have enough strength to lift it. Yatori moved his hand instead over to the sprite.

"... Yatori. Can you listen to his final words while he's still conscious."

"Alright. I'll do that…"

Yatori took Haro's place by Deinkun's head. She whispered to him that she would take his final words and took her ear near his mouth.

Deinkun moved his blue lips to squeeze out words. After hearing those words, Yatori brought her mouth close to his ears and replied. Warrant Officer Deinkun's head looked like it nodded slightly -- and with that, even his shallow breathing stopped. His death and silence ruled that place and even

overwhelmed the noise of war.

“... Yatori. Can I ask what his last words were?”

Ikuta asked hesitantly. Yatori replied back in surprisingly light tone.

“There were four in total. “I leave my comrades in the Empire to you”, “I want my partner Niki to go to my sister”, “next time, duel with me properly with those two swords” and the last one was closer to thinking out loud than a will.”

“Thinking out loud?”
“Yeah. He wondered if he kept his face as a knight.”

Yatori looked up into the sky as to hold back something from coming out of her eyes.

“He’s a modest man. He died an honourable death. There was nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Yeah, he did… What did you say to him?”

Yatori coughed once and replied, speaking with her usual brave but slightly hoarse voice.

“A knight who loved his country and comrade more than anyone, you fought braver than anyone. Deinkun Harguska, may there be blessing and glory upon your soul.”

A fitting eulogy. Ikuta thought that in his head. He could never find good enough words for situations like this.

“Thanks for not saying anything about it. I thought it when I came up with it too, but it seems old fashioned now that I say it again. It looks like fitting words don’t really come out when you need them.”

Ikuta swayed his head at Yatori while smiling bitterly. She was being modest. When asking a knight to deliver a eulogy for a knight, there was no one more fitting than Yatori to deliver those words.

Following her, Torway, Matthew and Captain Sazaruf approached and offered their words one by one before Warrant Officer Deinkun’s body.

The march resumed an hour later and the casualties from the ambush were moved to the rear, with destination for the dead and the living diverging completely.

The dead were going back and the living continued forward. To the next battle. Forward and onward.